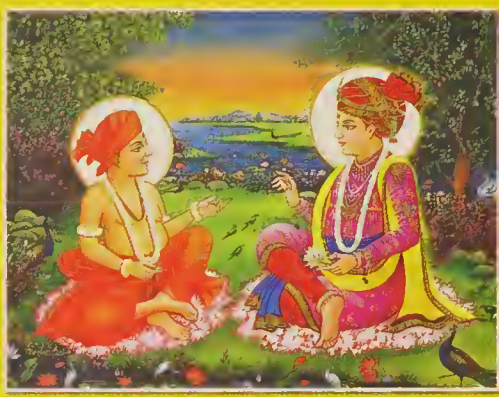


ਗਿਆਰਵੇਂ ਗੋਟਵੇਡ & ਗੋਟਪਰਬੇਡ

(sentiments, sacraments & symbols)





Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

The Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) is a global socio-spiritual organisation committed to the moral and spiritual uplift of mankind. It was established in 1907 CE by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj in consonance with the Vedic teachings propagated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781–1830 CE).

The Sanstha's global network of 12,000 Satsang centres, 55,000 volunteers and over 850 sadhus implement a variety of philanthropic and spiritual activities. BAPS is an NGO in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Its world renowned cultural and spiritual complexes like Akshardham in Gandhinagar and New Delhi, and the Swaminarayan Mandirs in London, Houston, Chicago, Atlanta, Toronto and Nairobi, are some of its epoch-making contributions to society. Under the inspiration and guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS has earned an endearing and unique place in the hearts of millions throughout the world.

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hindu rites & rituals

(sentiments, sacraments & symbols)





ભગવાત મહારાજ કુંડ



सुस्वागतम्



Welcome to the mystical world of Hindu rituals

hindu rites & rituals

(sentiments, sacraments & symbols)

by

Sadhu Mukundcharandas



Swāminārāyan Aksharpith,
Shahibaug Road, Amdavad-4, India.

hīndu rīteḥ ē rītualē (Sentiments, Sacraments & Symbols)

Adapted from *Dhārmic Vidhāno ane Bhāvnā* by
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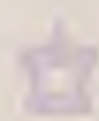
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Dedication

To Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and his third spiritual successor Shāstriji Mahārāj,
founder of BAPS and His Holiness Pujya Pramukh Swami Mahārāj.

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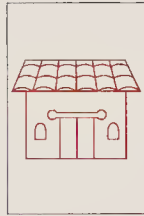
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Navrātri p.111, chopadā pujaṇ p.112, lighting divā p.112, Diwāli p.113, Mandir lighting pp.114-115, divās in tirth pp.150-151, ashes & burnt wick p.193, offering pranāms p.205, reciting story from Mahābhārat p.206, Ganesh utsav p.207, tilak & chāndlo p.236, Tulsi vivāh p.269, kanthi p.272, simant rite p.283-284, lagna patrikā p.300, chandarvo p.303, sāmaiyun p.306, five articles p.307, samput and mandap p.307, washing and pujaṇ of feet p.308, jav-til and saptapadi p.310, saubhāgya chinha p.311, paidu sinchvu p.312, Gruha Lakshmi p.313, pinda offerings p.320, bathing and pujaṇ p.322-323, shrāddh rites p.324, shobhā yātrā and naukā vihar p.338, purna kumbha p.378, kalash p.380, deep p.382-383, Rāmānandi tilak p.386, Ganesh sthāpan p.392, Ganesh pujaṇ p.403, tulsi divo p.404, Gaudiya shikhā knot p.414.

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– Swāminārāyan Aksharpith

Foreword

Sanātan Dharma is known all over the world as a tradition of culture, art, mysticism and spirituality. It also has the oldest living practices in the form of rites and rituals. Until recent times, Hindus practised these on faith, like their forefathers. Unfortunately, today's Hindus, influenced by materialism and the ever-present 'science versus religion debate', tend to distance themselves from these rituals. They ask, "Why do we perform them? What is the need?"

The answers to these and other doubts do exist, in Sanskrit texts. However few people today know Sanskrit. Even less have time to search through translations. Lack of answers lead them to lose faith in practising rituals and religion generally. The power of science, T.V. and electronic media also add fuel to the fire and often ridicule Hindu practices.

This book aims to provide answers and cogent arguments for all Hindus seeking answers to questions that may have irked them. It can be a vital tool for Hindu parents to inform their children about Hindu rituals. Yet this book also reaches out to young Hindus themselves, who can learn the reasons underlying rituals. They will then be able to explain to their friends, without shying, that Hinduism is more than just yoga and mysticism, and can be practised in today's hi-tech life.

Similar to a previous book, *Hindu Festivals – Origin, Sentiments & Rituals*, (2010), this book has attempted to capture the authenticity, essence, colourful charm and rich variety of Hindu rituals. Moreover, the inclusion of fifteen new chapters with a photographic account, hopes to provide a new, festive dimension to rituals, which should be an enthralling and enlightening experience. The answers and scientific elaboration about the significance of rituals hopes to remove any stigma and doubt usually associated with Hindu rituals; of them being old fashioned, rote and impractical in modern life.

It may surprise young Hindus to know that several rituals discussed in this book such as mānsi pujā, meditation and prānāyāma, can improve their overall physical health, immunity, power of concentration, memory, creativity and performance in sports, in addition to the spiritual gains.

Hindu Rites & Rituals (2010)

photographs: 756

paintings: 125

maps: 22

This is because they activate right-brain function, which deals with the above factors. The same rituals induce zest for living, since they directly focus on Bhagwān, who is the fountainhead of divinity, as well as the inspirer of the *ātmā* residing within. Practising Hindu rituals will also help them identify and connect with a cultural tradition which is over 10,000 years old. It will boost their self-esteem and pride in being Hindus.

Besides the rituals of the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, which are based on Vaishnavism, this book incorporates similar religious rituals practised in the important Vaishnava and Shaiva traditions and mandirs of India.

Today with finger-tip access to the internet, young Hindus often come across a wealth of information about Hindu rites and customs that are a common feature of Sanātan Dharma. However they are then stumped about its accuracy and context. Often the accounts are interpretations of a particular website, whose answers are based on its own philosophical tradition, which may conflict with the surfer's own tradition and beliefs. On such occasions, surfers need an easily readable book, which quotes the sources of the rituals from the original shāstras and explains the variations of its practice in other beliefs and regions.

This is such a book. For easy reference, the rites and rituals have been divided into five parts, with references of the shāstras wherever possible. The five parts comprise:

- mandir rituals
- bhakti rituals
- home rituals
- personal rituals and
- important sacred symbols related to rituals.

In these five sections, readers can glimpse into the vast and mystical phenomenon of rituals, practised by a billion Hindus worldwide. They can appreciate the underlying scientific approach of the rishis who gifted these rituals to mankind. Young Hindus especially, can glean the answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) regarding Sanātan Dharma's varied religious beliefs and practices.

The following questions are a sample, from the traditional to the philosophical and spiritual:

Why should one practice rites and rituals? Why should one perform morning puṇā? How does a Hindu pray? Are prayers answered? How is a *murti* different from a statue? Why do people ring a bell on entering a mandir? Why do Hindus join their palms in *pranāms* instead of shaking hands? Why should one offer *pranāms* to parents every morning? Why should one have a spiritual guru? How does a *tirth* arise? What is the significance of serving others (*sevā*)? Why should one have a home shrine? What is the significance of performing puṇā(n) of a newly purchased house, business or object such as a fridge, car, etc.? What is bhakti (devotion)? Can stress be relieved by chanting mantras? What is the purpose of clapping when singing bhajans? Is it Yog or Yoga? What is the importance of celebrating festivals? Why is fasting, rather than feasting, observed during certain sacred days and *jayantis* (anniversaries) of avatārs? Of all rituals of sādhanā, which pleases Bhagwān the most? Why is marriage regarded as a sacred sacrament? What is so significant about avoiding pre-marital relationships? Why is vegetarianism an important Hindu diet norm? Why are certain plants, trees, animals and objects considered sacred or auspicious?

Answers to these and other questions appear in this book. It would be favourable to begin the book from chapter 1. However in eagerness to seek an answer, the reader may choose to dive in at any other part, without feeling a break in sequence, since each part is conclusive and not textually continuous with the next part. To find an answer speedily, refer to a key word in the Index.

– Publisher

Introduction

Every culture in the world has its own customs, rites and rituals relating to marriage, diet, prayer, meditation, atonement, pilgrimage and so forth.

Sanātan Dharma's rishis, seers and shāstras formulated rituals and rites which helped mankind to live in harmony with nature and with others. Ultimately these rituals aimed to elevate man spiritually, to realise the Supreme Reality.

The rituals and rites dealt with in this book incorporate references from the Vedas, Purāns, Panchrātra shāstras – classed as shāstras of bhakti, *jnān*, *kriyā*, *charyā* and *yog* – the Dharma shāstras (treatises of law), which deal with codes of conduct, such as the *smrutis* of Manu, Yāgnavalkya and other rishis, Rāmāyan, Mahābhārat, the Gitā and shāstras of the Swāminārāyan sampradāya.

Significance of rituals

Understanding the rituals and rites of a culture, and their underlying sentiments and mode of practice in daily living, deepens respect and tolerance and helps man co-exist in harmony and brotherhood.

For Hindus, especially the younger generation, understanding rituals makes them more meaningful, helps clarify misconceptions, increases respect for Sanātan Dharma and inspires them to imbibe these rituals in their own lives. It also increases their pride in belonging to the most ancient tradition in the world. It even helps them to tolerate insults. Hindus who are not given samskāras (nurture) by parents from early childhood, tend to develop an inferiority complex and cultural identity crisis when confronted with issues raised at school by peers and even teachers. Ignorant of their lofty cultural roots, such young Hindus reject their Indian identity and mimic peers (Warner 1998:62). For instance, they will readily practice rituals in other forms such as the gesture of bowing, similar to *pranāms*, to their martial arts instructor, yet disdain and feel uncomfortable in offering *pranāms* to parents, other family elders, sadhus and even deities!

Hindu rites and rituals instil, invigorate and perpetuate cultural and spiritual traditions; factors which are beginning to lose their importance in today's hi-tech, materialistic and

fast-paced lifestyles. Practiced from childhood, Hindu rituals empower the young and their parents with spiritual fortitude, since ritual acts as a medium to connect with the Divine and to earn His grace and blessings. With such spiritual fortitude, an individual is better able to cope with daily life's toughest stressors. Even more potent and the root of all discord, are the internal stressors, the *swabhāvas* – base instincts – such as ego, anger, lust, avarice, greed, hate and others. With the help of rituals such as *satsang** and *kathā* – listening to the *shāstras*' discourses and Bhagwān's glory – the turmoil within, caused by *swabhāvas* can be calmed and eradicated.

'Individual ritual helps synchronise the participant with some higher form of being, whether that be the rest of the world, the universe or God.'

– Eugene d'Aquili & Andrew Newberg in *The Mystical Mind* (1999:89).

**Satsang – association with Truth – Bhagwān, true shāstras and Satpurush, the sadhu who has realised Bhagwān.*

Historical perspective

From a historical perspective, the practice of rituals of *vidhi* and *nishedh* – the do's and don'ts respectively – had been negated and falsified by later followers of Shankarāchārya (778-810 CE), known as pseudo-Vedantis. In 1820, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan commented upon this in Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā I-42. He explained that such Vedantis regarded the moral do's and don'ts as false, as well as heaven and hell, which are attained by observing *vidhi-nishedh*. They claimed that, the disciples and the guru, who attain heaven or hell are also false. Only Brahman is *satya* (truth) – *brahmasatyam jaganmithyā*. He elaborated that Shankar, who was the *āchārya* of all Vedantis, enjoined his disciples to recite the *Gītā* and *Vishnusahasranām*; to bow to those older than oneself, to beg alms and so propounded *vidhi-nishedh* (*Charpatpanjarikastotra*-13, *Yatidharmanirnay*-p.241, *Samnyāsdharmapaddhati*- p.33,34). He further composed the *Bhaj Govindam stotras* of the *Charpatpanjari* praising Vishnu, and bhajans glorifying Shiva, Ganapati, Surya and other deities, precisely because he feared that an atheistic tendency would creep into people's hearts. Therefore Bhagwān Swāminārāyan declared that no matter how knowledgeable a person is, or the state of his spiritual realisation, he is still obligated to observe the rituals of *vidhi* and *nishedh* advocated by the *shāstras*.

Modern science and rituals

The first generation Indian migrants to all parts of the world, practiced rituals out of faith in the wisdom of the ancient seers who enjoined these rituals. However subsequent generations were less inclined to practice by faith.

They needed coaxing and convincing with scientific reasoning. In the past two decades, medical researchers have discovered the benefits of Hindu rituals and certain disciplines, at least on the body and mind.

Though the rishis may not always have divulged reasons for the rites and rituals, scientific evidence is beginning to support them. In the early 1950s, a French researcher, Alfred Tomatis M.D., declared that the foetus was capable of hearing. This supports the Hindu belief that nurture (*samskāras*) occurs during life in the womb. The story of Prahlād, who heard Bhagwān Vishnu's glory while in his mother's womb, listening to sage Nārad talking to his mother is well-known. Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, while in Subhadra's womb, learnt the secret of penetrating six of the seven battle formations (*kothās*) of the Kaurav camp, by listening to Shri Krishna talking to Subhadra.

The benefits of Patanjali rishi's Yog postures is well known to a billion people practicing worldwide. Similarly, researchers have also investigated the effects of meditation and chanting mantras. They report that these induce a blissful calming in the body, which they have measured scientifically.

One meditation technique, Transcendental Meditation (TM), is the most widely practiced and researched, with over three million people having learnt it. Dr. Vernon Barnes of the University of Georgia has reported that long term practitioners of TM have significantly lower blood pressure.

A team of researchers in India researched the effect of chanting mantras. At the Vivekananda Kendra Yoga Research Foundation in Bangalore, scientists reported that chanting OM mentally, achieved a significant reduction in heart rate, which led to a deep form of relaxation, with increased alertness (Telles 1995: 418-420). In 1998, the same team also reported that chanting a meaningful syllable such as OM, caused a decrease in heart and breath rate, compared to a neutral syllable such as ONE, which did not produce a similar effect (Telles 1998: 57-63).

Researchers also contend that rituals, whether in humans or animals, serve an important purpose of reducing acts of aggression between group members. Moreover, they create a strong social bond between individuals of the group. Anthropologists also note that rhythm and repetition are common in almost all human rituals, from chanting hymns to

tribal fertility dances. The elements of rhythm and repetition of rituals help an individual to belong to a larger group or cause. In their book, *Why God Won't Go Away*, the medical researchers, Drs. Newberg and D'Aquili, posit that secular rites promote social cohesion by encouraging individuals to set aside personal interests to commit themselves for the common good. They further contend that the aim of ritual is to transcend the self and blend it into some larger reality, for example, to unite worshippers spiritually with a higher sense of reality (2001:80-81).

Other researchers report that drum rhythms, repetitive muscle tensing and relaxing, and contributing factors such as fasting, hyperventilation (increased breathing rate) and inhalation of incense fragrances, all affect the brain, to produce emotional responses and intensely pleasurable, ineffable experiences.

Along with these rituals, if a meaningful word is used such as a mantra, then this induces an even greater effect (Telles, *et.al.* 1998:57-63). Combining rhythm and meaning makes a ritual more powerful. A Hindu ritual that incorporates all the above factors, is *ārti*. It includes drums, bells, conch, incense, visually attractive stimuli such as the exquisitely adorned *murtis* of deities, and singing the appropriate lyrics. This ritual of waving lighted wicks – known as *divā* (Hindi – *diyā*) – in front of the deities, is the most endearing to Hindus. Singing the accompanying and meaningful lyrics of invocation and supplication, has an intensely transcendent effect in followers. Researchers describe this as 'religious awe' (Newberg 2001:89). Many non-Hindu visitors to new Vedic *shikharbaddh* mandirs in London, Houston and Chicago experience this. Schoolchildren in England visiting the London mandir have written back to thank the mandir's volunteers and divulged that the *ārti* (*Rājbhog ārti* at 11:15 am.) was the most delightful and memorable moment of their visit.

Public rituals

A ritual such as meditation performed alone, is reported to be nearly impossible in bringing mysticism and spirituality to the masses as do ritual and liturgy (Newberg 1999:95). In contrast, some rituals such as *ārti*, *dhun* and those *utsavs* (festivals) celebrated in a large gathering create the

'Even if rituals seem formal and antiquated to modern thinking, they are mysterious and awe-evoking and leave indelible marks in our brains'.

– Dr. Herbert Benson in Timeless Healing (1996:179).

Formerly Assoc. Prof. of Medicine, Harvard Medical School.

environment cited earlier. This involves repetitive chanting of bhajans or Sanskrit *stotras*, the accompaniment of a variety of traditional Indian musical instruments such as *sitār*, *tablā*, *mrudang*, *shehnāi*, *manjirā*, *chhablicā*, etc., collective clapping, the resounding crescendo created by drum beating, gongs (*zālar*), conch (*shankh nād*), bell (*ghanta nād*), hailing the ‘Jai’ (victory) of the deities, the fragrances of fresh flowers and garlands of jasmine and rose, the typical fragrance of the *garbha gruha* – of burnt ghee of the *divā*, *ārti*, incense, and the collective presence of *bhaktas* themselves. All these multi-sensory stimuli would be impossible to create at home. These collectively evoke ‘religious-awe’ and help create and consolidate the group members’ unity. In the BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya this solidarity is known as *suhridbhāṇ*. Newberg calls this, ‘a sense of corporate unity’ (1999:95). This *suhridbhāṇ* stemming from public rituals breaks mundane barriers and establishes solidarity and *shānti* at three levels: personal, communal and global.

Therefore Hindu rituals meant to be performed in large *satsang* congregations should be performed there, using all the required parameters of *mantras*, materials, instruments, appropriate physical actions, all guided by an enlightened spiritual guru. These rituals are extrinsic, those performed externally. However there are also intrinsic ‘rituals’, such as introspection, developing *ātmanishthā* and an understanding of Bhagwān’s mahātmya – greatness and glory. These are higher factors of *sāadhanā*, which an aspirant practises within.

Rituals and the path of bhakti

Man loves his body more than anything else. His life and daily activities are primarily body-centred, to pamper it. Only by disengaging himself from this self-centredness can he evoke his inner sentiments (*bhāvnā*) of bhakti – devotion for Bhagwān.

The Shāndilya Bhakti Sutras define bhakti as:

|| *Sā parānuraṅgi bhaktiḥ Ishvare.* ||

– bhakti means offering intense love to Bhagwān.

Of all endeavours to please Bhagwān, the rishis proclaim bhakti as the greatest:

|| *Bhaktiḥ tuṣṭiḥ kevalam na tu guṇaiḥ.* ||

– Bhagwān is pleased by only bhakti, not by worldly virtues (of *māyā*).

In his code of precepts, known as Shikshāpatri (103), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan also similarly defines and qualifies bhakti:

॥ *Māhātmyajñānayugbhuri sneho bhaktischa Mādhave.* ॥

– intense devotion to Bhagwān with a fully developed awareness of His glory and greatness constitutes bhakti.

Alongwith satsang, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan laid equal emphasis on the path of bhakti. Hence the sampraday's rituals are bhakti-centered.

Women's role in rituals

In the early 19th century, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan established lofty codes for women, of purity of worship, devotion, and equal eligibility of learning religious lore. Firstly, he abolished the evil practices of sati and *dudh piti* (drowning a female baby in milk). He also forbade them to sing obnoxious songs, known as *fatānā*, during marriage rituals. Secondly he empowered *them* in several innovative ways, and in essence founded the first women's wing among any contemporary sampradāyas. He appointed senior women well versed in the sampradāya's canons to instruct women devotees who were illiterate. This enabled them not only to acquire spiritual knowledge, but also to offer worship to Bhagwān on an equal level as men. He also appointed elderly women to perform the sacred ritual of initiation, known as *vartmān*, to females who wished to join the sampradāya, as well as to new-born girls. This practice continues today.

While staying at the court of the Kāthi chief, Dādā Khāchar, in Gadhadā, he gifted small *murtis* of Vāsudeva Nārāyan (Lālji) to Dādā's two sisters, princesses Jayā and Lalita. He instructed them that during his absence they should offer loving devotion to the *murtis*, as they would to him. The princesses often witnessed Lālji drinking milk and having food before their own eyes.

In 1813 CE in Gadhadā, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan celebrated Annakut, the festival of offering foods made from the first harvest. He instructed the two princesses to manage the cooking of the hundreds of food dishes for Annakut.



murtis of 'Lālji' gifted to princesses Jayā and Lalitā by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan



now at the Swāminārāyan Mandir (Gopināth deva) in Gadhadā, Saurashtra, India.

Since then, women devotees prepare hundreds of food items for Annakut. This was traditionally the forte of male Brahmin chefs.

Even today, in the BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā in India and abroad, the first vegetarian food offerings of Annakut on Bestu Varsh (New Year's day) on Kārtik *sud* 1, are prepared and exquisitely decorated by the women's wing. In the Hari mandirs* in India and abroad, the *pujāri's* wife cooks the food and helps her husband in every way for the worship rituals.

**Hari mandir
A building of worship in which the
pujā rituals are performed by a
householder. In contrast, a Vedic
shikharbaddh mandir is constructed
of stone and marble according to the
ancient shāstras of architecture. In
these mandirs, the pujā rituals are
performed by sadhus.*

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan also provided special worship areas for women. Later, separate mandirs were built for women in some regions such as Kachchh and Charotar in Gujarat. Women managed these, including the *pujā* rituals, preaching from the *shāstras*, and celebration of festivals. Only with such spiritual nurture could women impart *samskāras* to their children. By practising *bhakti* rituals themselves, they have contributed significantly in perpetuating them in their families. Today, in over half the families of BAPS followers, the evening *ghar satsang sabhā* is managed by the mother.

In the BAPS mandirs and centres, the women's wing independently manages all religious observances, rituals and other activities, on an equal level as the men.

Rituals in a changing social and cultural milieu

The lives of Hindus worldwide have been continually influenced by modern trends.

Children who are not taught the meanings underlying Hindu rituals and festivals by their parents, remain ignorant and therefore often lack the vocabulary to describe the materials used in rituals or names of the deities whose festival is being celebrated. The British sociologists, Jackson and Nesbitt, cite this in their book *Hindu Children in Britain*. *Rākhi* (*rākhadi*) becomes 'a sort of a string', 'this kind of bobble', 'string bracelet', 'kind of rope'. The water squirter or *pichkāri* used to squirt coloured water during Holi was described by a Hindu boy as a 'bike pump' and the Shiva in his own home shrine as 'OM' (Jackson 1993:86, 77).

When young NRI Hindus are informed about the significance of mantras, bhajans and other poetic lyrics, and their benefits in practical life such as overcoming exam tension, racial slurs from peers, etc., then they themselves

will yearn to learn and recite them enthusiastically. Jackson and Nesbitt report the beneficial experiences of young Hindus who recite mantras such as the Gāyatri and others invoking Shri Rāma, Shri Shiva, Govind (Shri Krishna), Lakshmi, Saraswati and Ganeshji (1993:97-103). A girl recited the Gāyatri mantra in the morning with her grandmother, which made her “happier in the knowledge that God will help her”. Another girl revealed, “When I’m in trouble I say it (Gāyatri mantra) and I have good luck” (1993:97).

As recently as 2006, a young Hindu woman wrote of her childhood in a town in England. She recalled that when she was sent to primary school, she had “no grounding in her cultural heritage and that meant I had no identity.” She adds, “during religious education classes at school, the Sikhs and Muslims would tell the class about their religion, not missing a single detail. Clearly, their families had taught them well.” In her late teens, as she increasingly began to identify herself with Hinduism, she once asked her mother why (young) Hindus were discouraged from getting involved in their religion. Her mother’s incredible reply indicates the sheer naiveté and disinterested attitude of many NRI Hindu parents. She replied, “Hindus believe religion will act as an obstacle to modernity and religion isn’t so fashionable... only uneducated people get involved in religion!” Later, by her own efforts, she began to discover Hinduism and “information about Bhārat Mātā (mother India). People around me began to respect my presence as a Hindu.”

During marriage and reception rituals, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj’s heartfelt advice is not to hold parties and dancing. In January 2006, when a young devotee arrived in India from England to get married, Swamishri humbly requested the youth and others with him to pledge not to hold a party. Parties and dancing are *rājasic* activities that vilify the sanctity of Hindu marriage samskāras.

After marriage, Swamishri enjoins couples to avoid honeymoons and advises them to visit tirths and mandirs instead. There they should perform *Mahāpujā* or *abhishek* of Neelkanth Varni and pray to Bhagwān and the *guru paramparā* for blessings to attain the four endeavours of life.

Pramukh Swami Mahārāj also cautions followers about T.V., the internet, cell phones and violent video games. In 2000, he advised children to avoid these, as well as

Religious rituals and well-being

To those Hindus who believe that rituals are old fashioned and outdated:

‘It (ritual) powerfully relieves man’s existential anxiety, and, at its most powerful, it relieves him of the fear of death and places him in harmony with the universe. It is no wonder that any behavior so powerful has persisted throughout the ages. Indeed, it is likely to persist for some time to come..... ritual behavior is one of the few mechanisms at man’s disposal which can possibly solve the ultimate problems and paradoxes of human existence..... Religious ritual behavior may take new forms within the context of highly developed Western technological societies. But whether in new form or in old, it is much too important to the psychological well-being of a society for it to lapse into oblivion.’

*– Eugene G. d’Aquili, M.D.,
formerly assis. prof. of psychiatry,
Univ. of Penn.,
and Charles Laughlin, assoc. prof.
of anthropology and linguistics,
State Uni. of N.Y. at Oswego,
(1975:54-55).*

‘chat-rooms’. However for those who need the internet for study purposes, he advises great *vivek* – discretion. As for cell phones, he has enjoined all owners not to use them while driving. In the mandir, at least in *kathā* and while doing darshan, he considers it bhakti, *vivek* and humble decorum to switch them off.

During Navrātri (*Nortā*), it is customary for females to observe forms of fasting, *pujā* and *garbā* – traditional folk dancing, to please Bhagwān’s *Shakti* – *Mātāji*. Towards this end, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj stresses that traditional decorum be strictly observed, by celebrating within the female wing. Nor should they resort to non-traditional styles of dancing such as ‘disco-garbā’, as has insidiously become vogue. To young men who wish to perform *dāndiā-rās*, he enjoins them to do so separately. He points out that the underlying sentiment of *garbā* and *dāndiā-rās* is to please Mataji. Since she herself is a *pativratā* (chaste), young Hindus should emulate her, rather than earning her displeasure by abandoning one’s dharma in her name.

For ‘special’ days such as mother’s day, father’s day, Valentine’s day and others, he often reminds Hindus that everyday is a parent’s day, based on the shāstra’s injunctions of *mātru devo bhava* and *pitru devo bhava* – to revere and serve parents as deities everyday. As for Valentine’s day, and dating for that matter, Sanātan Dharma’s sublime morality regards the whole world as one family – *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*. This means that male Hindus should regard all girls and women as their sisters and mothers, respectively. Similarly, females should regard boys and men as brothers and fathers, respectively. Hence for unmarried young people, the concept of a ‘Valentine’ or dating does not arise. Shri Rāmachandra Bhagwān has endorsed this sublime ideal of pre-marital purity (ref. p.203).

Diet norms and ritual purity

As far as the daily diet of BAPS followers is concerned, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj insists Gujarati parents and youngsters to have traditional, Gujarati vegetarian cuisine daily. During his visits abroad, he often enjoins this to followers. A foresighted visionary, he is aware of the role of maintaining traditional diets in order to successfully transmit Hindu samskāras to future generations. Even a vegetarian

diet, albeit imbalanced, based on Western dishes can lead to health disorders (see margin). This creates problems when children visit relatives or sacred places in India. These problems then create an aversion in children to visit their motherland in the future. Hence they miss a vital link with the most important source of samskāras; their motherland.

The first and most important criterion for diet is that food should be purely vegetarian, without any *himsā* being committed during its cooking. Commercial and fast foods, though tasty, may contain additives of animal origin. Hence Pramukh Swami Mahārāj cautions young people who have an affinity for such foods. The second important factor concerns the spiritual purity of food. Ideally it should be cooked and handled by those who observe the sampradāya's codes of precepts and diet norms. Primarily, this means members of one's family. On social occasions, one can have food cooked by relatives or friends who either observe such norms or are willing to prepare the food by such norms.

A change related to diet of Hindus living abroad, concerns the main meal of the day. Formerly, either in India or East Africa, this was lunch. However, in the West this changed to dinner. With this change, a new problem arose; television. Job schedules of parents often mean that children have their evening meal in absence of one or both parents, in front of the T.V.. To allay its detrimental effects as much as possible and to maintain values, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj insists that the whole family should have the evening meal together, and then hold the daily *ghar satsang sabhā* together as well. These two rituals are important factors in maintaining family cohesion, unity and promoting values of Sanātān Dharma.

In reviving such values, beliefs and rituals, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj's success is laudable. There are two reasons for this. One has been his personal outreach by travelling, correspondence and counselling worldwide, since the early seventies. The second factor of his success, is the construction of Vedic stone mandirs and satsang centres. These serve as vital sources of information and inspiration for Hindus in observing and practising rituals and celebrating festivals in as pristine a manner as enjoined in the sacred shāstras of Sanātān Dharma. The manner in which mandirs are intertwined with rituals will become apparent as readers turn the pages of this book.

– Author

Diet trends and disorders in children of Hindu migrants

NRI Hindu parents are witnessing an increasing occurrence of certain disorders in their children, which were rare in India, such as, increased dental decay, chronic constipation, abdominal cramps, obesity, food allergies, headaches, migraines, colds, asthma, chronic nasal congestion, sinusitis, tonsillitis, nasal polyps, eczema, psoriasis, and even colitis. These disorders arise from a diet heavily based on dairy products, sugar and refined white flour, by children and often by their mothers. All baked items, which were rare in India during their own childhood prior to the 70s, are notoriously also over laden with fats and sugar and lack fibre. These include white bread, pastry, biscuits (cookies), chocolates, cakes, jams, jellies, spreads, pies, pizzas, sodas, etc. These foods hook children, who tend to eat less green vegetables. If at all, their favourite is potatoes in the form of french fries or jacket potatoes. As expected, such NRI children are often obese and yet anaemic, as has been noted by physicians at the Pramukh Swami Health Care & Research Centre, at the BAPS HQ in Amdavad, India.

Pramukh Swami Mahārāj's outreach homes visited – 267,000

letters read & written – 700,000 (an average of 50 per day)

Vedic shikharbaddh mandirs consecrated – 28

Hari mandirs consecrated – over 800

Akshardhām monuments – 2 & third planned in Edison, N.J.

Part 1 – Mandir Rituals

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Introduction

The eleven chapters in Part I discuss rituals and their underlying sentiments related with a Hindu shrine of worship such as a *mandir*. First a few words about the origin of *mandir* rituals in the *shāstras*.

The Vedas of *Sanātan Dharma* are known as *Nigams*. Another important body of *shāstras* are the *Āgams*. These are as old as the Vedas and are therefore known as *Vedic Āgams*.

The main *Vedic Āgams* are the *Vaishnava*, the *Shaiva* and the *Shākta*. There are two main branches of the *Vaishnava Āgams* – *Vaikhanas* and *Panchrātra*. The precepts and rituals of the former are observed in the famous *mandir* of *Venkateshwar Bālāji* in *Tirumālā* and many others in *Andhra Pradesh*, *Tamil Nadu* and *Kerala*. It is the details of ritual worship in *mandirs* that differentiates the *Vaikhanas* and *Panchrātra* practices. The rituals and rites dealt with in this book incorporate references from both, with a slight emphasis on the *Panchrātra Āgams*, since the *Swāminārāyan sampradāya*'s rituals are based on these.

The first chapter on *mandir* discusses the concepts of a *mandir* as a structure representing the living body of the Deity and its relation to the *murtis* (deities) consecrated within. This leads to the important issue of *murti puja* and its spiritual significance in an individual's life and *sādhanā*.

The chapters that follow, namely *Ārti*, *prasādam*, *Abhishek*, *Pātotsav*, *Satsang* and *Pārāyan*, form an integral part of the rituals performed in a *mandir* generally. Other rituals that occur in a *mandir* such as *utsavs*, *yagna*, donation, *maanta* and *tirth yātrā* – if the *mandir* is very sacred – are included in Part II only arbitrarily, for the sake of dividing the chapters in a lucid order for readers to understand the concept of *bhakti*.

The concept of *prasādam* is unique among world religions. This chapter offers a visual photo gallery of the vast variety of *prasād* that is offered to devotees in the major shrines and holy *dhāms* located in different regions of India, after the food has been sanctified by the Deity.



1. Mandir (Worship shrine)

- Mandir
- What purpose does a mandir serve?
- What is the need for building large mandirs?
- Unique features of a Swāminārāyan mandir.

Historically, though the word mandir was exclusively used to denote residential structures in the Gupta period (4th c. CE). It seems to be first referred to as a temple, as well as a house, by the rishi Varāhamihir (505 CE), in his Bruhat Samhitā.

Mandir

Paramātmā is omnipresent. His *bhakta* sees, loves and reveres Him in every living being – in man, animal, or plant. He even sees Him in every non-living thing, in every particle of matter. It is precisely to accept the humble and devotional service of His *bhakta*, to grace bliss to him, Paramātmā either personally manifests Himself on earth, or through a *murti* in a dwelling called a mandir.

What purpose does a mandir serve?

In the mandirs built in conformity with the Agam shāstras, Bhagwān's *murti* is consecrated by reciting Vedic mantras. *Murtis* sculpted from stone or of metal are not just sculpted statues but the manifest form of Bhagwān or deity. They are revered and worshipped as the living form. Devotional service such as waking up, bathing and then adorning exquisite garments and ornaments, and offering food, are just some aspects of daily devotional worship from morning till night, when Bhagwān retires for the night's rest. In this way, the *bhakta* not only avails of His varied darshan during the day, but also experiences bliss.

Added to this, devotees also come into contact with the sadhus who live in the mandir complex. Their purity and sublime wisdom give *bhaktas* solace and peace of mind, parameters rarely found elsewhere. The talks of these sadhus, though simple and practical, are laden with profound spiritual import. They transform countless people by eradicating their bad habits and addictions. People's lives are then suffused with bhakti and dharma. Through spiritual discourses (*kathā*)

मंदिर

Other names for mandir in ancient texts:

archāgruha, vimāna, prāsāda, devāgāra, devagruham, devāyātanam, devasthānam, devālaya, devākulanī, bhavanam, veshman, harmyam, kirtanam, sadanam, sthānam.

"A mandir is a college of Brahmavidya."

– Yogiji Mahārāj
(Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's fourth spiritual successor)

'The temple is the most characteristic artistic expression of Hinduism, providing a focus for both the social and spiritual life of the community it serves.'

'No village in Hindu Asia is complete without a temple...'

– George Michell (1977).
The Hindu Temple (pp. 14,183).

"The temple is not an archaeological essay, but a sermon in stone, suggesting by its symbolism the rhythm of the cosmos, teaching the lessons of the universal life, and recording the sacred traditions of the Indian people."

– E.B. Havell, *A Study of Indo-Aryan Civilization*

opp. page: Shri Jagannāth Mandir, Puri, Orissa (eastern India)



'To the pilgrim and devotee who goes to the temple, it is a Tirtha made by art, as others are by nature, and often it is both in one. A Hindu temple unlike the Vedic altar does not fulfil its purpose by being built; it has of necessity to be seen. Darsana, the looking at the temple, the seat, abode and body of divinity and its worship (pujā), are the purpose of visiting the temple. To fulfil this purpose in addition to being an offering and work of pious liberality the temple has not only its proportionate measurement but also the carvings on its walls, and the total fact of its form'.

– Stella Kramrisch
The Hindu Temple I (1976:143).

A mandir moulds man.

A mandir moulds society.

A mandir purifies society.

A mandir induces morality.

A mandir creates stability of mind.

A mandir inspires bhakti.

A mandir achieves peace and happiness.

A mandir uplifts lives.

A mandir keeps alive traditional architecture and craftsmanship.

A mandir, directly or indirectly, is the most important source of Hindu rites and rituals, is instrumental in keeping them vibrant and transmits them to future generations.

by sadhus, *bhaktas* are enlightened about *ātmā* and Paramātmā, for contentment and peace. Even lay visitors experience Bhagwān's presence in mandirs. Recitation of His *līlā* and bhajans extolling His glory, sanctify the mandir's atmosphere.

In his *A History of Village Communities in India*, A.S. Altekar, a sociologist listed six functions of village mandirs: (1) as a place where children gathered morning and evening to learn the three R's (which invariably also included Sanskrit) (2) where village litigants settled their quarrels by the Panchāyat (3) where the weary traveller could rest at night (4) in its precincts the villagers assembled for social talks and recreation (5) during an epidemic, to pray to the deity to 'graciously stop the calamity' and (6) where religious talks were delivered on days of religious sanctity and observances (1927: 117-8). In *Hindu Festivals (Origin, Sentiments & Rituals)*, the author adds six other functions of equal importance: (7) maintained the pristine worship rituals, (8) boosted people's spirituality (9) increased brotherhood and hence the social cohesiveness of the people, (10) naturally helped maintain law, order and communal peace, (11) perpetuated the cultural traditions of a particular religious or lingual group and transmitted its cultural identity to the next generation and (12) promoted art, performing arts such as *Bhārat Nāṭyam*, music – both vocal and instrumental – and architectural heritage, as enjoined in the *śāstras* about mandir construction. Functions 6 to 12, applied to shrines in cities too (Mukundcharandas 2005: xlvi-xlvii).

What is the need for building large mandirs?

People do not object to multiplex cinemas, theatres, casinos, pubs, night clubs and gambling houses built at great cost, even though such places degrade society, and destroy its morality and character. People are least concerned when man and society are morally ruined. This is rooted in man's tendency for *vishay bhog* – indulging in sense pleasures.

Intellectuals often suggest building schools, hospitals and orphanages, instead of mandirs. Agreed that they are all needed. Yet can a hospital do the job of a school? Will an orphanage do the work of a hospital? Each has its own unique function. Society needs all such buildings. We fail to realise that all these institutions primarily depend on man. To



mould a man's character either directly or through his cultural and familial heritage, there is no better educational institution than a mandir. To spend money for such an important 'man-moulding' school, the mandir is probably the greatest asset and the healthiest contribution to society. Its size also has an important effect.

Just consider the size of bungalows and country mansions of millionaires, superstars and political leaders. The opulence of their residences will reflect the prestige and economic status of the country. So it is but natural for *bhaktas* to expect the dwelling of the *Swami* (master) of all creation, to be as grand as possible. In ancient India, *maharajas* were pious and of a religious disposition. They accepted *Paramātmā* as the *Swami* of their kingdoms. This inspired them to build large mandirs and consecrate *murtis* of *Paramātmā*. However today, from the money earned by the sweat of their brows, it is the lay devotees who build lofty mandirs and monuments which benefit society. A good example of such benefit is that addicts who visit the *Akshardhām* monuments in Gandhinagar, Gujarat and New Delhi, pledge to renounce their addictions. Atheists become believers. Non-vegetarians vow to observe *ahimsā*.

For the devotees themselves, a mandir boosts their spirituality and love for *Paramātmā*

Pramukh Swami Mahārāj on purpose of mandirs

"A mandir increases moral values. If they prevail, then there will be peace of mind. We build homes and factories for our personal needs, whereas the mandir is a place where everyone can have equal benefit. On our doors we write, "No admission without permission." Here everyone is "welcome". The mandir promotes universal brotherhood. The whole world belongs to *Paramātmā*. And *Paramātmā* belongs to all. Here there is no discrimination. We are all here for *moksha*. Peace of mind will be experienced here. Many problems are solved by prayer and *darshan* of *Paramātmā*.

"In this world, when someone gives us something, we are always grateful to him. Similarly we should do something for *Paramātmā* who has given us so much. Whoever serves here selflessly with mind, body and wealth, will be repaid infinitely by *Paramātmā*."

In August 1994, a reporter from UK Today – a T.V. network, asked Shri Pramukh Swami Mahārāj the reason for building a mandir in London. Swamiji replied:

"First of all it is for the many Hindus living in London. Secondly, wherever a man goes, he takes his culture and noble sentiments (*bhāvnā*) with him. This mandir will foster these sentiments."

'Let him who wishes to enter the worlds that are secured by yagna offerings and ishtapurta (constructing wells and the like), build a temple, by which he attains the fruits of both'.

– Rishi Varāhmihir
Bruhat Samhitā (LVI. 2)
6th century CE

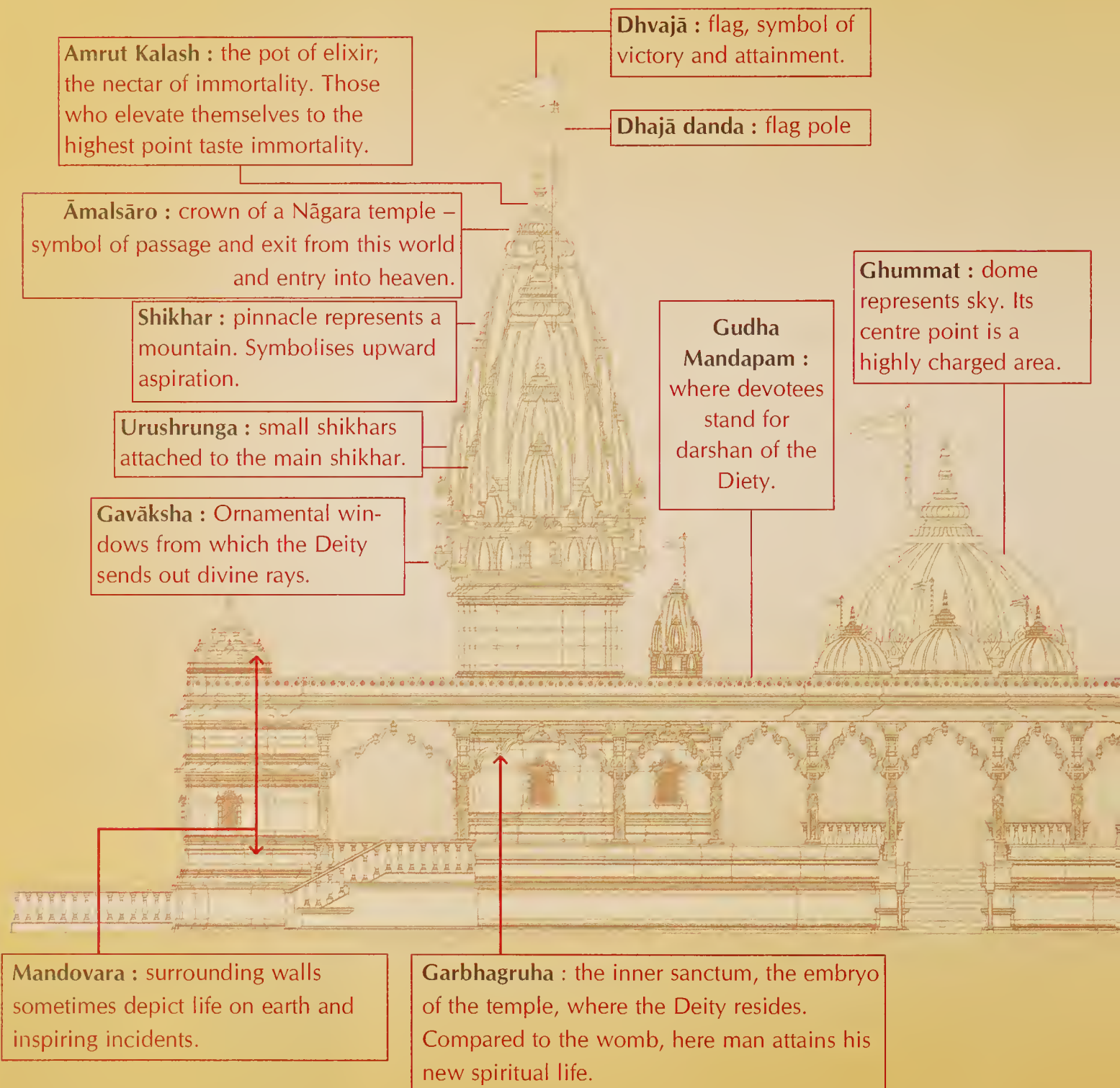
'Archāswarup - consecrated images should be made at riversides, forests, gardens, at the sides of ponds, on hill-tops, in beautiful valleys and in caves. At these places, the denizens of heaven are present...'

– Vishnudharmottara (3/93/25-31),
7th century text



Mandir – A Living Form of the Divine

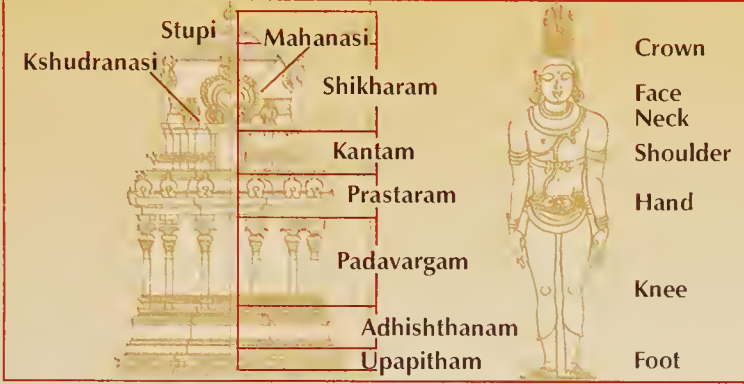
The building represents ‘**Prakriti**’- the cosmic nature and the Deity within is the ‘**Purusha**’, the Divine Being.



प्रासादे देवरूपं स्यात् पादौ पादशिलास्तथ ।
 गभश्चवोदर ज्ञेय जघा पादोध्वमच्यत ॥ ३० ॥
 स्तम्भाश्च जानवो ज्ञेया घण्टा जिह्वा प्रकीर्तिता ।
 दीपः प्राणोऽस्य विज्ञेयो ह्यपानो जलनिर्गतः ॥ ३१ ॥
 ब्रह्मस्थानं यदतच्च तन्नामिः परिकीर्तिता ।
 हृदयं पीठिका ज्ञेया प्रतिमा पुरुषः स्मृतः ॥ ३२ ॥

पादचारस्त हकारो ज्योतिस्तच्चक्षरुच्यत ।
 तदूर्ध्वं प्रकृतिस्तस्य प्रतिमात्मा स्मृतो बुधैः ॥ ३३ ॥
 तलकभादधो द्वार तस्य पजनन स्मतम ।
 शुकनाशो भवेन्नासा गवाक्षः कर्ण उच्यते ॥ ३४ ॥
 कायपाली स्मृता स्कन्धो ग्रीवा चामलसारिका ।
 कलशस्तु शिरो ज्ञेयं ध्वजाः केशाः प्रकीर्तिताः ॥ ३५ ॥

– Shilpratnākar



In the Shilpa shāstras, the sacred texts of architecture, a mandir is described as **Devaswarup** – the body of Paramātmā where the...

Ādhār Shilā : foundation are feet

Sthambha : pillars are knees.

Garbhagruha : inner sanctum is stomach

Brahmasthan : place of image is navel

Simhāsan : throne is heart

Murti : image is ātmā

Ghant : bell is tongue

Deep : lamp is breath

Shukanāsa : lion is nose

Gavāksha : windows are ears

Āmalsāro : shikhar top is neck

Kalash : golden pot is head

Dhvajā : flag is hair.

Gopuram : mandir gateway, separate structure from the mandir in south Indian temples.



Toran : arch

Sthambha : pillars represent cosmic columns. Strength and support.

Footwear is removed on entering a mandir because a mandir is not only a place of worship but an object of worship as well. Every part of it is sacred.

Mandir – Metaphysics and Subtle Concepts

Only if the temple is constructed correctly according to a mathematical system can it be expected to function in harmony with the mathematical basis of the universe. The inverse belief of this also holds true. The Mayamata states,

Mānam dhāmrastu sampurnam jagatsampiurnatā bhavet

– if the measurement of the temple is in every way perfect, there will be perfection in the universe as well.

– Mayamata 22/92

After construction of the temple, the sthapati (architect) also prays that the people be 'healthy, wealthy, happy, well known and famous for a long time and that the victorious king protects the whole earth, full of cattle and plants'.

– Ishānashivagurudevapaddhati (IV, Ch.34.51).
Ancient Vāstu text

'India not only thinks in images. It builds them up in a consistent body of which the sum total is the temple'.

– Stella Kranrisch
The Hindu Temple I (1976:175).

'Hinduism is a living tradition for which even the most rudimentary of building forms may be appropriate. Man is still able to achieve contact with the world of the gods.'

– George Michell
The Hindu Temple (1977:184).

- (1) Just as there is milk in the body of a cow, it is capable of manifesting only in the udders. Similarly, although the Supreme Reality (Paramātmā) is omnipresent in the entire cosmos, He is has the capacity of being experienced in a mandir.
- (2) A mandir is like a radio. Although sound waves are vibrating in the atmosphere, we cannot catch these directly. A radio has the capacity to catch these sound waves, and so we can hear sweet-sounding music.
- (3) Similarly, like the 'tuning' of a radio or TV, a mandir is like a receptive centre which tunes Bhagwān's waves of love, mercy and knowledge. In the mandir, devotees experience the feeling and existence of the Supreme Reality.
- (4) The seers developed mandirs as a form of 'socio-economic centres'. The mandirs' donations were offered back to society in the form of alms to the poor and supported artisans, craftsmen, sculptors, teachers, musicians and pundits.
- (5) The constant religious study and spiritual practices in a mandir internally 'charges' it. This in turn naturally relays subtle waves on the outer side. Therefore the area around the mandir becomes a 'charged field'.
- (6) The layman received the most constructive instruction of his life from the mandir.
- (7) By creating mandirs, the seers presented a tangible form of the Supreme Reality, which induced in man, a yearning to realise Him through His constant darshan, devotion, worship, prayer, *kathā* and remembrance.

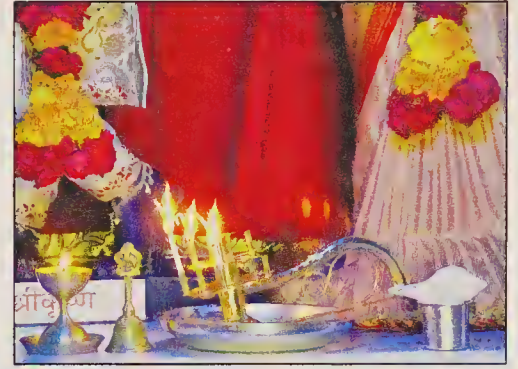
Unique features of a Swāminārāyan Mandir

The *shikharbaddh* mandirs of the Swāminārāyan *sampradāya* in India, generally have the following features:

- (1) The five *ārtis*:



Name	Meaning	Approx. time
i. <i>Mangalā</i>	Auspicious awakening.	6.00 am.
ii. <i>Shanagār</i>	After breakfast and decoration with garments & ornaments.	7.30 am.
iii. <i>Rājbhog</i>	After offering grand lunch.	11.30 am.
N.B.	Although <i>ārti</i> is not performed, fruits are offered.	4.00 pm.
iv. <i>Sandhyā</i>	Evening.	7.00 pm.
v. <i>Shayan</i>	After dinner. Bhagwān retires for the night's rest.	8.30 pm.



gaushālā, Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Sārangpur



gymnasium, Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, London

- (2) The Mahāpujā – performed every morning between *mangalā* and *Shanagār ārtis*, in the *sabhā mandap*.
- (3) The five (or three) *kathās*. Timings are variable in each mandir and the discourses are delivered by sadhus.
- (4) The older mandirs may also display sacred relics of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan such as: utensils, garments and clothing, *mālās*, and other miscellaneous artefacts.
- (5) A sadhus' āshrama – living quarters for sadhus.
- (6) A *sabhā mandap* (hall) – for holding *kathā*.
- (7) A *dharmashālā* – lodging facilities for pilgrims and the mandir's staff.
- (8) A *bhojanshālā* – food halls to feed pilgrims and the poor.
- (9) A *gaushālā* – cowshed, sometimes situated separately from the mandir complex, if space is restricted.
- (10) A *pāthshālā* – for studying *satsang* literature
- (11) The *kothār* – general store.
- (12) The *bhandār* – kitchen.

Modern additions

Offices for *satsang* activities like: youth and children's wings, women's wing, and a book-stall for *satsang* publications and an exhibition about either BAPS's history & activities or Hinduism. In the Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir's campus in Neasden, London, a gymnasium has been added.

FAQs

1. Why should we wash our hands after removing shoes outside a mandir, home shrine or touching our feet ?

Before entering a mandir or any holy shrine, Hindus remove their footwear outside. In India's warm climate, people usually wear slippers or sandals which can be slipped off without using hands. However for those who wear shoes and footwear with strings, buckles, straps or velcro, one has to use one's fingers. One's feet and footwear are regarded as impure. To perform any holy ritual one then has to rinse one's hands with water. No need for soap. Water is regarded as Varuna deva, whose touch purifies.

Our hands need to be ritually pure inside the mandir because: we may touch a holy text, a book of bhajans or *stotras*, perhaps kindle a *divo* or an incense stick, place some flowers or fruit before the deity, perhaps take *prasād* given by the *pujāri* and if an opportunity arises, touch the feet of sadhus or mahant. For all these holy rituals, it would be our religious duty and respect if we rinsed our hands after touching footwear, touching one's mouth after having *prasād* or any other food, and ideally, even after repeatedly cleaning one's nose with a handkerchief or tissue if one has a runny nose. In the West people worry about not shaking hands with somebody who has a cold, for fear of catching an infection. Similarly, we should also think about the ritual purity of our hands before we enter a place of worship. That is why many mandirs and shrines in northern India, have washbasins nearby. If it is just not practically possible to rinse one's hands with water after removing footwear, then one should try to avoid touching holy objects inside the mandir.

2. Why do people ring a bell on entering a mandir?

It is believed that deities remain manifest in mandirs in which bells (*ghanta*) are rung. In Hindu mandirs, bells are usually hung in the area or porch preceding the inner sanctum. Devotees ring them as an invocation to the deity to listen to their *prārthnā* and be blessed. Young children love to jump up and ring the bell. Such *samskāras* of childhood remain during adulthood.

The bell is rung prior to *ārṭi* to inform devotees to rush for *ārṭi*'s darshan. During *ārṭi* the bell's auspicious (*māṅgalik*)



leaving footwear before entering a shrine



visitors washing their hands after removing footwear at Swāminārāyan Akshardhām, New Delhi



ornate bell (50 kg) at Kardam rishi's āshrama, Siddhpur, N.Gujarat, gifted by the Rājā of Nepal on Fāgan vad 10, Samvat 1544 (1488 CE)

sound wards off evil. When rung with a tuned rhythm, the bell's *māngalik* sound (*nād*) has the power to focus the wandering and hyperactive mind on the deity and sentiments of the *ārṭi*'s lyrics. During *ārṭi*, the bell's sound has the effect of spiritually boosting a person in the morning and relieving the day's *māyic* stress in the evening.

In India, bells can be heard ringing in the morning (*shanagār*) and evening (*sandhyā*) *ārṭi*s, in every city, town and village. This collectively, spiritually energises the immediate vicinity of a shrine. The ringing bell ineffably attracts people's attention. If they happen to pass by a shrine during *ārṭi*, regardless of whether the deity is their Ishtadeva or not, they devotionally offer a slight bow or place their right hand on their chest or offer *pranāms*.

Such is the devotional reverence (*bhāvnā*), inherent in the hearts of Hindus.

Unique sound and symbolism of bells

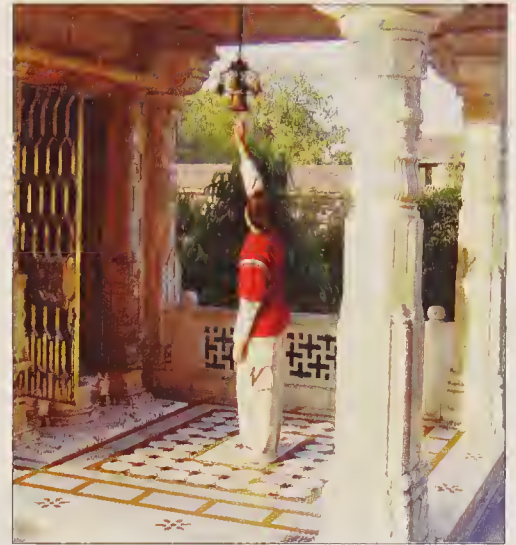
There is an art and science of making bells to produce the requisite sounds. There are bells specially made to produce the long strains of the sound OM. The handle of a *ghantadi* signifies *prāna* – the vital force in the form of Hanumānji, Garud, Nandi or Chakra. During Garud *sthāpanavidhi*, the handle is offered *pujan*. A bell without a handle in one of these forms is forbidden in rituals, since it may augur misfortune. The body of the bell is said to represent the divinity of time (Āgama-Kosha 1992 VI:99).

3. Why do devotees take care not to turn their backs to deities on exiting a mandir?

This practice is prevalent especially in north and south India. This is an act of reverence and respect that one should not turn one's back to the deities or one's spiritual guru. This is considered disrespectful. This is similar to the respect one offers when leaving a king or queen. The individual faces the regent while walking backwards till exits the hall. Therefore this respectful decorum should also be devotionally observed when visiting a mandir and one's spiritual guru.

4. Why do some people hold their ears in front of the deity?

This gesture, with hands crossed, is often observed among Hindus doing darshan (see photo). Through this, a *bhakta* conveys three sentiments: surrenderence to Bhagwān



devotee ringing a bell at a shrine



ghantadi

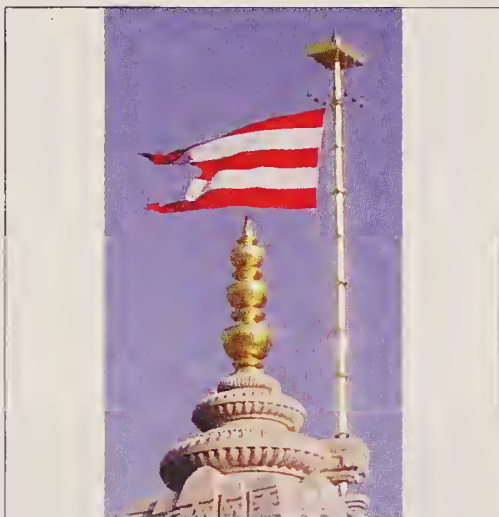


ornate bell

One should not sit with legs casually extended in front of the guru, devatā and agni (fire) (Skand Purāna, Ma. Kau. 41/127).



In the Venkateshwar Bālāji mandir in Tīrumālā Devasthānam, Bhagwān is awakened at 3 a.m., with the singing of stotras and bhajans known as Suprabhātam, stotram, prapatti and mangalam. Suprabhātam literally means 'good morning'.



BAPS flag on shikhars

the red and white striped flag on the pinnacles of the BAPS Swāminārāyan mandir's has the following symbolism:

red colour – represents bhakti and upāsana.

white colour – purity of character (by obeying agna).

Hence the flag represents agna and upāsana – the two 'wings' to achieve moksha.

(sharanāgati), admission of any misdeeds (nishkapatbhāv) and forgiveness (kshamāyāchnā).

5. What is the significance of singing *prabhātiya*?

Prabhāt means morning. *Prabhātiya* are bhajans with *raags* specially composed to be sung in the morning. They lovingly beseech the deity to awaken and perform the morning ablutions. The accompanying imagery, rich with the sounds and splendour of early morning (in a tropical climate), splendidly vivify the morning atmosphere and its auspiciousness. Singing *prabhātiya* is a traditional form of bhakti in adoration of Bhagwān's morning *lilā* and glory.

6. Why do people clap while singing bhajans and dhun?

Clapping while singing bhajans or *dhun* is a feature unique to Sanātan Dharma. In other world religions, there is greater emphasis on silence during prayer in public gatherings.

There are several important reasons for clapping. The most important is that by clapping, a person has to participate actively. Such active physical involvement breaks him out of sloth and lethargy. This then helps the wandering mind to focus on the bhakti ritual. The doleful mind has a notorious tendency to revel in *māyic* thoughts. When the palms clap, the mind snaps out of such reverie.

Clapping also induces a strong physical response in a person. Acupressure points in the palms are stimulated, which in turn activate all other organs of the body. Its most important physical effect is to increase circulation and rate of respiration. These collectively prime the mind to attain a heightened consciousness than one at resting level. Additionally, this will also activate the emotional level. This induces the devotee to appreciate the bhakti ritual and attach his mind to it.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan advocates clapping very enthusiastically and with a raised voice to chant Bhagwān's name when overwhelmed by bad thoughts (Vachanāmrut Loyā 6). He prescribed this powerful ritual as being therapeutic to jolt a person out of apathy, depression or moodlessness. In philosophical terms, this overcomes *rājasic* and *tāmasic* thoughts.

7. Why do some devotees touch the steps of a mandir while climbing its steps and then touch their heads?

The steps of a mandir are used daily by hundreds of *bhaktas*. The *shāstras* extol great glory of *bhaktas*. Therefore the steps are hallowed by the glory of the feet of *bhaktas*. So when a person touches the steps, he is actually hallowing or sanctifying himself with the holy dust particles of *bhaktas*' feet, on his head; to confer purity and humility in his *buddhi* (intellect).

When Yudhisthira held an Ashwamedh yagna, Shri Krishna Bhagwān himself used to collect the plates of *bhaktas*, after their meals everyday. Such was his humility and *mahimā* (glory) of *bhaktas*. This form of bhakti is known as *pādsevanam* (see Ch.12 – Navdhā Bhakti).

8. How to offer reverence to deities:



Vishnu – shankh mudrā



Shiva – Shivaling mudrā



Surya – palms forward



Ganesh – forefinger



schoolchildren devotionally touching the steps of the Swāminārāyan Akshardhām, New Delhi





2. Prāna Pratishthā

(Image consecration)



- Murti purification
- Prāna pratishthā
- Shāligrām and Jyotirling

Prāna pratishthā is the sacred ritual of invoking the Deity in an image by performing rites and chanting mantras stipulated by Panchrātra Agam shāstras. In south India's mandirs, this is performed according to the Vaikhanas and other Āgams.

Murti purification

(1) Karmakutir

Once the ārtisan, sculptor or painter finishes the *murti* in his work dwelling, it must be purified. This process of purification is known as *Karmakutir*. First, the ārtisan himself touches the whole *murti* with a bundle of *darbh* grass. *Darbh* is a long, stalky species of grass, which is considered as having purifying properties. This removes any evil influence off the *murti*. The ārtisan then closes the *murti*'s eyes, by smearing a thin layer of ghee and honey. Then either he or brahmin pundits perform 200 *āhutis* (oblations) or *homs* while chanting mantras. Other *homs* follow by *ahuti* of chanting *Aghor* mantras, the *Mrutyunjay* mantra and mantras which keep disease and death at bay.

The purpose of such purification is to prepare the *murti* so that when Paramātmā arrives to reside in the *murti*, it can behold the profound change that occurs, since the normal equilibrium of the *murti* will be altered. Additionally, Paramātmā will be residing in the *murti* till eternity. This is also an important consideration.

A *nādā chhadi* is then tied on the right wrist of the *murti*. For our purposes here, we shall discuss the rituals as applied to a sculpted or carved 3-dimensional *murti*.

(2) Jalādhivās

The *murti* is then shifted to the *yagna mandap* – area where the *yagna* is to be performed. Here the *murti* is submerged in *jal* – water. Hence this ritual is known as *jalādhivās*. One purpose is to check whether the *murti* is totally whole, and not *khandit* (damaged) in any way. A small amount of *panchāmrut* is added into the vessel. Other *pujā dravyas* are added while chanting mantras.

प्राण प्रतिष्ठा

Eight types of murtis:

1. *shaili* – marble or stone,
2. *lauhi* – metallic,
3. *dārumayi* – wood,
4. *lepya* – sandalwood paste or clay,
5. *saikati* – sand,
6. *lekhyā* – drawn, painted or etched,
7. *manimayi* – gems
8. *manomayi* – visualised in the mind – not of any physical material.

– Shrimad Bhāgavatam 11/17/12



pujā dravyas for murti prāna pratishthā

opp. page: Pramukh Swami Mahārāj
performing prāna pratishthā rites,
Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Houston

The vessel is then covered with cloth. Then mantras of Agni are chanted for further purification. The cloth is then removed and the *murti* awakened by sounding a *ghantadi*. The *murti* is then removed and rubbed dry.

(3) *Dhānyādhivās*

A layer of *dhānya* (grain or pulses) is then spread on the floor. The *murti* is laid supine on this layer. More grain is poured over the *murti* until it is totally covered. The *dhānya* is usually rice or wheat grain. *Dhānyādhivās* further purifies the *murti*.

(4) *Ghrutādhivās*

After *dhānyādhivās*, the *murti* is totally submerged in cow's ghee (*ghrut*), hence *ghrutādhivās*. Cow's ghee is considered pure. Since this process endangers *murtis* of stone and marble – prone to slipping due to the ghee, it is often avoided. Instead, a piece of cotton wool soaked in ghee is placed on the main toe of the right foot. The *murti* is again 'awakened' and then placed on a stand or wooden cot.

(5) *Snapan rite*

Snapan, also known as *abhishek*, is the ritual of bathing a *murti* with a liquid such as milk, water, and so forth. This rite is a grander form of purification involving 108 different types of materials – such as: *pañchāmrut*, water containing essence of various fragrant flowers and leaves, water which has been poured over the horns of a cow, sugar cane juice, etc. One *dravya* is placed in one pot. In this way, 108 pots are placed in front of the *murti* in three *vedhis*: *dakshin* (south) *vedhi* has eleven pots, *madhya* (middle) group has eleven pots and the remaining pots in the *uttar* (north) group.

Abhishek is then performed with the contents of each pot. Each *dravya* has its own mantra. Such a vast array of pure substances render the *murti* immense *shakti* and purity.

An extremely rare ritual in the Panchrātra shāstras is known as *Anantakalashsnapanam*. It is performed using 1000 pots on *murtis* in mandirs every hundred years (see p.65).

(6) *Netra-anāvaran*

After the *snapan* rite, the sculptor stands behind the *murti* and holds a mirror in front of the *murti*'s face. By looking at the *murti*'s eyes indirectly, reflected in the mirror, he removes the layer of ghee and honey with a golden *shalākā* (needle). This is known as *netra-anāvaran* ritual. Thus the *murti*'s first immensely powerful *drashti* (vision)



Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's metallic *murti* immersed in ghee



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj performing *netra-anāvaran* ritual with a *shalākā*



should not fall on a human being. Instead, it is offered food already arranged in front of it prior to the *netra-anāvaran* ritual.

(7) *Shodshopchār pujā*

This is followed by *shodshopchār* (*shodash upchār*) *pujā*. After rubbing the *murti* dry, it is laid on a new mattress, with food and a pot of water for one night's rest. For sleep, *Nidrā* devi – goddess of sleep – is invoked with *āhawān* mantras. All through the night, ten brahmin pundits continually perform 200 *homs* in the *yagna*, away from the sleeping *murti*. While the pundits offer *āhuti* of ghee in the eight directions (*ashtādikshu*), one drop of ghee is placed in a pot of water. In the morning, water from this pot is sprinkled on the sleeping *murti* to awaken it, while chanting *uttishtha* mantras.

The *murti* is then taken from the *yagna mandap* to the *garbha gruha* of the *mandir*. Here it is placed on the *pindikā* (pedestal). While chanting *mangalāshtak* – mantras of auspiciousness, a mason cements the *murti* into the *pindikā*. About half an hour later, when the cement has dried, the brahmin pundits (or the *Satpurush*) enter the *garbha gruha* to perform the *murti prāna pratishthā*.

Prior to this, just as the *murti* was purified to make it eligible for *prāna pratishthā*, the whole *mandir* too, has to be purified, with similar rituals. The *mandir* is *Paramātmā's* body, while the *murti* becomes its *ātmā* (ref. Ch.1, *Mandir*).



thousands of devotees participate in the sacred fire ritual of a *yagna* prior to *murti prāna pratishthā*



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj performing
prāna pratishthā of Rāma, Sitā and
Hanumānji

Rites and mantras during prāna
pratishthā include:

shodash samskāra, prānshakti
prārthnā, Gāyatri mantra pāth,
netronmilinam, ādarshnivedanam,
murti pujan, prārthnā, Ganpati
pujan, Hanumān pujan, naivedyam,
uttaraposhanam, nirājanam,
mantrapushpāñjali, prārthnā,
kshamāpanam, sampurnatā-
vāchanam, utsarjan samkalpaha,
āshirvād, pithasthdevānām,
visarjanam and tirthgrahanam.

*The mirror symbolises eight
auspicious objects or signs, namely:
Shrivatsa, purna kumbha, bheri
(drum), darpan (mirror), mandal
(diagram), two fish, shankh and
chakra (Purushottam Samhitā 11/36-
37, Kriyakairav Chandrikā p.66).

Rites and pujan during the various
stages of mandir construction in the
BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā:

shilānyās, laying the first pillar;
dwārshākh pujan, laying the first
stone beam across the pillars, laying
the final stone – the āmālsāro on the
shikhar and finally the kalash
sthāpan rite.

Prāna pratishthā rites

The Vaihāyasi Samhitā (9/82-84,90) of the Panchrātra, specifies details about who can invoke divinity in a *murti*: “One in whose every organ Paramātmā resides fully, that pure Mahapurush is eligible to perform *prāna pratishthā*, because it is only he who can invoke the Paramātmā within his heart into the *murti*.” Today in the BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj is such a Mahapurush (Satpurush).

Nyāsvidhi. This rite invokes Brahmā, Vishnu and Mahesh, the *Panchbhutas* (five cosmic elements), the ten *indriyas* in the different parts of the *murti*, followed by all letters of the Sanskrit alphabet (with the aid of *darbh shalākā* – needle, the rite starts from the head and down to the feet). The letters are invoked since they form the basis (*mātrukā*) of all mantras. Then mantras of *pratishthā* (invocation) are chanted. The Satpurush places his right thumb on the *murti*’s heart. Paramātmā’s *bij mantra* is chanted. After this rite, Omkāra is chanted 16 times, equivalent to performing 16 samskāras. Next follows *prāna shakti prārthnā*. Divine shakti of Paramātmā emanates from the Satpurush and enters the *murti*. Gāyatri mantra is then chanted. The Satpurush then performs the *netra-anāvaran* rite – ‘opening’ the *murti*’s eyes, by removing the coating of ghee and honey with the golden *shalākā*. He then holds a mirror* in front of Bhagwān, so that He first has His own *darshan*.

This final rite completes the *prāna pratishthā*. Paramātmā has now graced the *murti*. The *murti* is now not termed *murti*, but the deity invoked. Hence a short pujā ritual with *gandh*, rice and flowers, is then performed.

In the BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā, a Mahāpujā is performed in the mandir’s mandap or hall, while *abhishek* is performed of the *murti* in the *garbha gruha*. *Shanagār* is offered after *abhishek*. Pramukh Swami Mahārāj then performs the *prāna pratishthā*. *Annakut* is then offered to Bhagwān. Swamiji then performs the first *ārti*.

Thus the BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā has revived and perpetuated the ancient Vedic tradition of the *prāna pratishthā* rites as specifically stipulated by the shāstras. Therein the sansthā’s mandirs and *murtis* have attained a unique aura and glory which is reflected in the *bhakti-bhāv* – devotional sentiments – of the followers. Visitors, including school children, also experience this divinity and ineffable

peace, which they acknowledge through letters and in the visitor's book in the new Vedic mandirs abroad. The inspiring strength behind this is the immutable faith of BAPS's spiritual successors.

Shāligrām and Shivalings

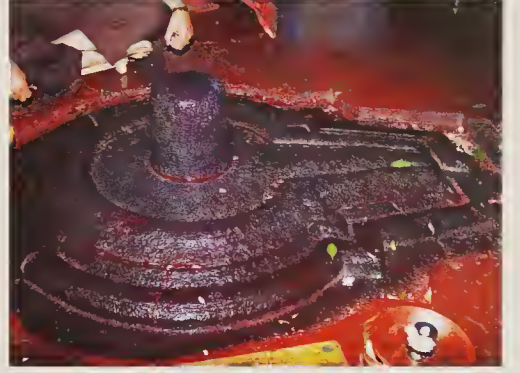
Murti prāna pratishthā is not necessary for *swayambhu* – self-formed – images. The *shāligrām* (*shālagrām*) of Vishnu, is a stone image which has appeared spontaneously in the river Kālī Gandaki, in the Himalayas (see details on p.268). There are also the *bāna lings* found in the river Narmadā and the twelve *Jyotirlings* – self-formed *lings* of Mahādeva (Shiva) (see details on p.149).

The *prāna pratishthā* ritual of Sanātan Dharma is unique in all the world's religions. Performed correctly as stipulated by the Agam shāstras, this sacred ritual is the most scientific and powerful manner of invoking the Divine into a non-sentient image. The vital factor of this ritual is the Satpurush – the Sadhu who has realised Paramātmā, who is in constant rapport with Him. Just as *tirths* in India originally attained their *tirthatva* – sanctity – by the contact or touch of an avatār, rishi or saintly personality, similarly, the Satpurush invokes the Divine in the *murti*, thus also creating a new *tirth*.

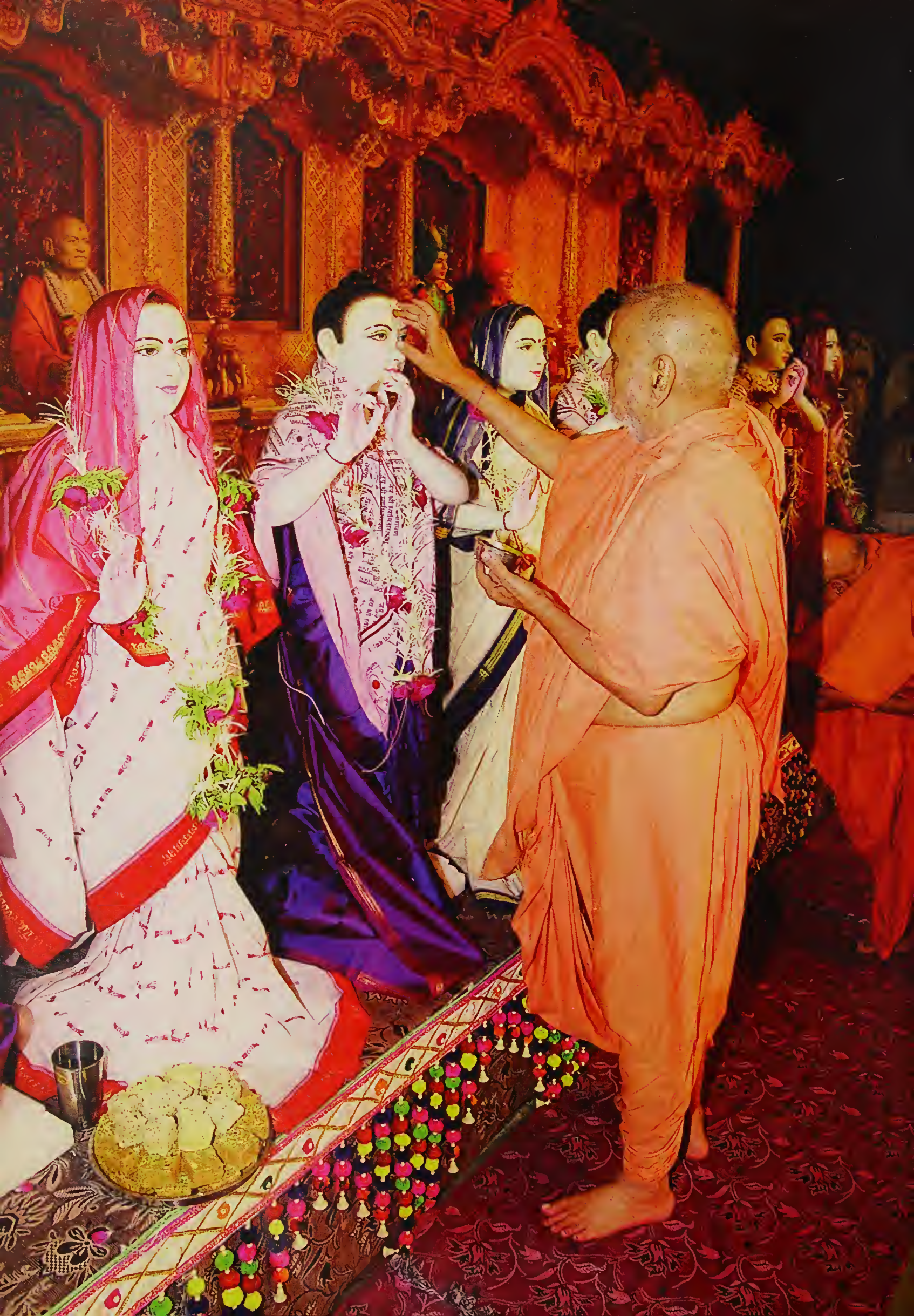
Mysterious energy infused in objects

In the former Czechoslovakia's Hradeo Kralove University's department of Physics, scientists performed experiments on a scientist named Robert Pavlita. He was able to mentally infuse and store 'psychotronic' energy in spherical objects of stone, steel, copper, etc. The scientists placed and started a fan in a sealed metal box. Six feet away Pavlita mentally started charging a spherical object – his 'psychotronic generator'. Gradually energy from this generator slowed down the fan to a complete stop. Then it began to rotate in the opposite direction! For two years the scientists tried to discover the secret of Pavlita's 'generators', but failed to offer an explanation. It is believed that Pavlita acquired knowledge about the 'generator' from Atharva Veda and Tantra shāstras.

If a lay man such as Pavlita, can acquire the ability to infuse some form of energy in an object, then is it not plausible for a Satpurush to infuse 'divine energy' in a *murti*?



Ghrushneshwar Mahādeva –
self-formed Jyotirling, nr. Ellora,
Maharashtra



3. Murti Pujā (Image worship)



- Murti pujā
- Evidence of the Divine's manifestation in murtis
- Bhagwān's murti pujā

मूर्ति पूजा

Sanātan Dharma believes in four fundamental principles: *Avatārvād* (descendance of Paramātmā), *Murti pujā* (image worship), *Karma siddhānt* (law of karma) and *Punarjanma* (rebirth).

Fully bearing in mind that Sanātan Dharma is eternal, we do find references of *murti* pujā in the Vedas:

Vishanave chārchate

– Rig Veda (1/155/1)

– There is a murti of Vishnu (Here *archā* means *murti*).

Another Vedic prayer beseeches:

Ahi ashmānamātishtha ashmā bhavatu te tanu

– Atharva Veda 2/13/4

– O Bhagwān! Please come and reside in this *murti* of stone. Make this stone *murti* Your body.

Namaste astwashmane

– Atharva Veda 1-13-1

– my salutation (namaskār) to You who dwells in the stone *murti*.

The Vedas also divulged the reasons for importance of *murti* pujā:

*Agninā rayimashnavat poshameva dive dive
Yashasam vishvattamam*

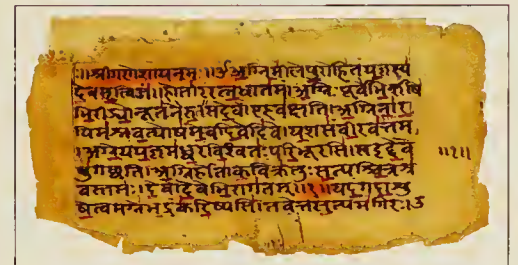
– Rig Veda 1-1-3

– one who daily worships the consecrated *murti* attains wealth, prosperity, sons, grandsons, etc.

After the Vedic period, the Panchrātra Agam texts elaborated details of *murtis*, mandir construction, sculpting, *murti* pujā and codes for the person worshipping *murtis*. These Āgams are of immense importance in the bhakti tradition.

Murti pujā

The semitic religions condemn *murti* pujā. However in essence, these also believe in it. For instance, a church, the Ka'ba stone, mosque, the cross on the altar in a church, a



Rig Veda – 1-1-1 Agni Sukta, Vikram Samvat 1778 (1722 CE), 1st page



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj performing pujan of Harikrishna Mahārāj

cross on a neck-chain, the statue of Mary with the child Jesus, all these are either symbolic representations or *murtis*. They are revered and worshipped as such. Protestants even have a painting of Christ and wear a cross. Many Muslims pray at the tombs of their saints. The Bible and Quran are regarded literally as the word of Paramātmā. This is worship of objects. Over the centuries, the erosion of St.Peter's toes in the St.Peter's Basilica in Rome, due to repeated touching by visitors revering the statue, is a form of *murti* puja.

The heart of believers will only feel contented and fulfilled if some tangible form is present before them. Meditating on something invisible or void is not conducive to man's inner feelings and yearnings. Man's mind is unable to grasp anything intangible. He is unable to visualise the Almighty in his imagination, or offer worship. Those who try, either fail or experience discord. This is precisely the injunction of the Gitā (12/5):

|| *Kaleshodhikataraha teshām avyaktāsaktachetasām,*
Avyaktā hi gatirdukkham dehavadbhihi avāpyate. ||

– one who tries to concentrate his mind on the formless experiences great misery and pain.

An argument is often put forward, about how an omnipresent Paramātmā can be confined in the limited space of a *murti*. This is naive, since if one does really believe Paramātmā to be omnipresent, then how can He NOT be present in a *murti* and be present everywhere else?

In a similar manner, if adept yogis (*siddhas*) are able to perform *par kāyā pravesha* – ability to enter the bodies and minds of other people, and if such lowly and evil phenomena like ghosts and spirits have the capacity to possess people, can the omnipotent Paramātmā not be invoked in a *murti* by sacred Vedic mantras?

The *Gunātīti Sadhu* – the true Sadhu of Paramātmā, also has the ability, due to his spiritual purity and greatness, to invoke Paramātmā in a *murti*, as revealed by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan in Vachanāmṛt Gadhadā I-68.

Lastly, if earthly (*māyic*) substances can radiate radioactivity, then can Paramātmā not emanate divinity through a *murti*?

In Sanātan Dharma, people convey their respect to a *murti* by lighting a *divo* and garlanding the *murti*, and then touching its feet in deep veneration.



*Pramukh Swami Mahārāj
performing puja of Ganpati's
murtis before consecration in
mandirs*

Murti pujā is veneration to the Divine through a *murti*. This inspires divine virtues in devotees.

Evidence of the Divine's manifestation in murtis

Sanātān Dharma believes in *murti pujā* – worshipping Bhagwān, His avatārs and deities in the form of images. Followers faithfully believe the presence of the Divine in such images and as such, offer them worship with faith (*shraddhā*) and loving devotion (*bhakti*). In turn, due to His *krupā* (grace), the Divine accepts this *bhakti*. Throughout Sanātān Dharma's history, He has let His manifestation and divinity known through various *murtis* and events. His singular purpose in this, is to foster the *bhaktas'* *shraddhā* and *bhakti*. The following miracles regarding *murtis* are the most well known.

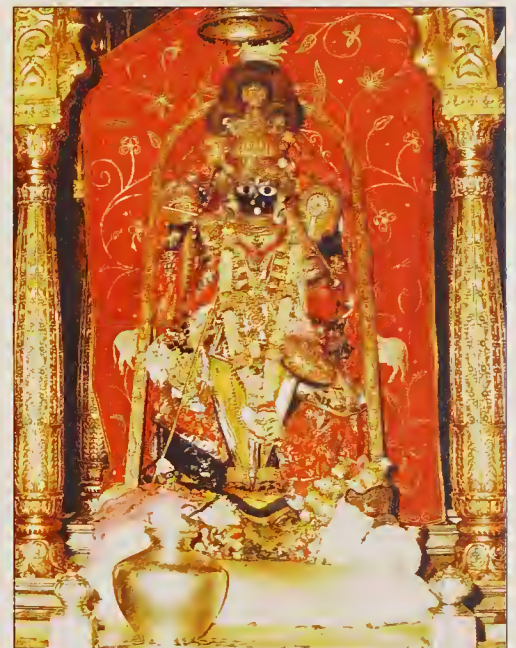
- A devout young Kshatriya named Vijaysinh, lovingly known as Bodāno, performed a *yātrā* twice a year to Dwarkā, by taking a potted tulsi plant and offering its fresh leaves to Bhagwān Dwarkādhish (Shri Krishna) for 60 years. When he was 82, pleased with his *bhakti*, Bhagwān instructed him to bring an ox-cart, in which he would accompany Bodāno to Dākor permanently, so that he would not have to walk to Dwarkā. At night the *mandir's* locked doors opened miraculously. Bodāno took the *murti* from the sanctum and left Dwarkā. Bhagwān commanded him to sleep, while he drove the cart! The next morning they arrived in Dākor! This historical day was Kārtik *sud* Purnimā Samvat 1212 (1156 CE) (Pandya 1912:6).

However, the Gugly *pujāris* in Dwarkā gleaned about Bodāno's theft. While they set off hotfoot for Dākor, Bodāno hid the *murti* in the Gomti pond in Dākor. When the *pujāris* arrived, they demanded the *murti*. One of them angrily hurled a lance at Bodāno, killing him on the spot. At that moment blood swirled up in the Gomti pond. Apparently, Bhagwān was also wounded by the lance, indicating his constant rapport with his dearest devotee.

When the *pujāris* hauled out the *murti*, Bhagwān instructed them to return to Dwarkā. He would give them gold equal to the *murti's* weight. However Bodāno's wife, Gangābāi only had a small nose ring. Bhagwān told her to place this on the scale. She obeyed, adding a tulsi leaf. Miraculously, the weighing pan with the *murti* rose and that with the ring dipped!

The Vasudeva Nārāyan's murti gifted by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan to Jaya and Lalita, Kāthi princesses of Gadhadā, accepted their offerings, which disappeared completely on many occasions (see p.33a).

*On every Annakut since consecration in 1971, the murtis in the BAPS Swāminārāyan *mandir* in Sankari, south Gujarat accepts food, leaving evidence.*



Shri Ranchhodrāi, Dākor



*b. ass Nandi facing
Achaleshwar Mahādeva, Mt. Abu*



*Mirābāi, the bhakta-poetess merged
into Shri Ranchhodrāji's (Shri
Krishna) murti in Dwarkā, when she
departed from this world.*

*Similarly, Āndāl, the female Alvar of
south India, merged into Bhagwān
Shri Ranganātha's murti in
Srirangam.*

*Numerous devotees and non-
followers report miraculous healings
and solutions to intractable
problems in life, after performing
abhishek of Neelkanth Varni in the
BAPS Swāminārāyan mandirs
(see Ch.8 Maanta).*



*Shri Parvatiji drinking milk,
Hong Kong (1995)*

*Places which reported the miracle:
India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka,
Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia,
Indonesia, Dubai, UAE, Australia,
Kenya, UK, Germany, Denmark, Los
Angeles, San Francisco, New York
and Toronto.*

Not wishing to hurt the pujāris' feelings, Bhagwān told them that in six months, they would find a similar *murti* in a step-well near Dwarkā. However the impatient pujāris located and fished out the *murti*, which was slightly smaller. Since then this *murti* gives darshan to devotees in Dwarkā, while the original, named Ranchhodrāiji, graces Dākor, all because of one devotee's sublime devotion, and faith in Bhagwān's *murti*.

- When Muslim aggressors lanced the brass Nandi in Achalgadh, Mt. Abu, poisonous bumble bees flew out of the holes and stung the aggressors, who fled. This miraculous event offers evidence of Divine presence in *murtis*. The lanced spots, which were later repaired, are indicated in the photograph (left margin).

- The famed bhakta Pundalik of Maharashtra, was once attending to his parents. Shri Krishna Bhagwān appeared in divine form next to him. Unable to leave his parents just then, Pundalik threw a brick near Bhagwān, as a seat. Bhagwān stood on it with hands resting on his hips. This is the place where the *murti* of Vithobā (Shri Krishna) is consecrated in Pandharpur, Maharashtra (see on p.58).

Global Milk Miracle

Bhagwān exists and manifests in *murtis*. On 21 September 1995, He decided to shower His grace on mankind, big time, globally. On this day, a man in New Delhi dreamt that Ganeshji wished for some milk. In the morning, the man rushed to the nearest mandir and proffered a spoonful of milk to Ganeshji's *murti*. To his utter joy, Ganeshji drank it! Within hours, this miracle was occurring worldwide for everybody. Hindus, non-Hindus and "hard-boiled" news reporters witnessed this personally. The CNN and local channels in the US and the BBC filmed this event and televised it.

Besides Ganeshji, other avatārs and devas also consumed milk, such as Shiva, Nandi, Nāg, Shri Krishna and Brahmā. Bhagwān revealed His presence even in *murtis* on a car dashboard or a glass-framed photo hanging on a wall – *murtis* in which *prāna pratishthā* was not performed.

Bhagwān's murti pujā

We are obliged to Bhagwān for many reasons. Therefore to offer our gratitude and respect, we become eager to do His pujā. Since He is omnipresent, how do we offer pujā? We do this in the same manner as we respect our parents or our favourite star or a statesman – by respecting his photograph or statue.

If one is inspired by the statue of a worldly figure, then surely one can also be inspired by Paramātmā's *murti*? This develops virtues like benevolence, love, purity, truth and non-violence in our hearts. Forgetting Paramātmā's infinite grace on us, we become egocentric. To prevent this, it behoves upon us to remain humble and vigilant. In order to kindle Paramātmā's divine attributes in us, we perform His *murti* *pujā*.

In Sanātan Dharma, there is only one Creator of the infinite cosmos, who is supreme, the all-doer, eternally divine, and eternally with (human) form. There are infinite *jivas* (souls) all bound by the ignorance of *māyā*. For *mukti* – redemption from *māyā*, the *jivas*' best and only resort is to accept surrenderance at the feet of Paramātmā, and to then serve and offer humble devotion to Him. The devotee can never become Bhagwān. *Bhakti* (devotion) remains the status quo before and after *moksha*. In other words, *bhakti* becomes the means and the goal.

This devotion and service is amenable only if Paramātmā is manifesting (*pratyaksh*) on Earth. The all-merciful Paramātmā, for the benevolence of His *bhaktas* (devotees) does incarnate on Earth. During this period, the *bhaktas* get a chance to offer devotion. When He physically leaves this world, He then manifests through His *murti*. This *murti* is not just an image or a symbol, but revered as Paramātmā Himself.

To facilitate *bhakti*, Paramātmā manifests in the *murti*. By focusing the mind (*chitta*) and senses on His *murti*, worldly desires are easily subdued. By this one's *prāna* – life-force – is also controlled and one attains the state of *nirvikalp samādhi* – the highest state of realisation by the *jiva* (see details in Ch.27 – Ashtāng Yog).

The uniqueness of Paramātmā's *murti* *pujā* is that through this medium, the *bhakta* experiences bliss resulting from *bhakti*. Once the *bhakta*'s mind stills in Him, he is liberated from the vitiating influences of his baser instincts



Testimonies of reporters about the Hindu Milk Miracle of 21st September 1995

"I took my daily pinta and joined the queue of faithful (at the Hindu Vishwa Temple in Southall, west London). I gazed in awe as the deity – a 12-inch marble statue of a bull – sipped milk from my teaspoon... As the spoon touched the idol's mouth, the liquid vanished."

– Macer Hall, Daily Star (London)

"I first went to the upstairs bedroom... and placed a spoonful of milk against a photograph of Ganesh and was astonished to find within seconds that the spoon was half empty. I checked to make sure that the glass frame of the photograph was not wet. It was dry. I could not believe what I was seeing."

– Rikee Verma, journalist, The Times (London).

CNN and local TV channels came and the miracle reportedly happened for them. "One reporter, Sharon Tae of Channel 5, was so excited she hugged me with tears in her eyes."

– Ravi Sharan (Vice president, Chatsworth Hindu temple, LA).



children offering milk to Ganeshji
(21st September 1995)





4. Pujā (Worship ritual)

पूजा

- Pujā
- Bhagwān's pujā
- Why is there a need for a *murti*?
- Guru's *murti* *pujā*
- Need for a guru
- What is the pujā ritual?
- Pujā dravya
- Types of offerings (*naivedya*)
- Pujā on other occasions

Pujā

The word *pujā* is derived from the Sanskrit root *puj*, meaning, to worship, to adore. *Pujā* is the act of worshipping, encompassing a host of feelings such as faith, humility, veneration, surrenderance and thanksgiving. *Pujā* is a meeting with Bhagwān.

In fact, we all do *pujā* whether we are theist or atheist, rich or poor, learned or ignorant. Some do *pujā* of living beings, some of inanimate objects.

If someone rescued us from drowning, would we not wholeheartedly thank him? Don't people adore dogs who guide the blind?

After the heroic efforts of the famous horse, Chetak, who saved Rānā Pratāp from Akbar's offensive in Haldighāti, Rānā Pratāp hugged Chetak. Was that not a show of gratitude and adoration? In everyday life one commonly sees various forms of veneration; the craftsman revering his tools, the racing driver kissing his car or the sportsman kissing his bat, racket, sports gear, a boat, etc.

Pujā in its simplest form, is a way of offering gratitude to something or someone who may have helped us in some way.

Bhagwān's pujā

We are thankful to an inanimate object or an animal or a person who has been helpful to us in some way. We are indebted to the sun on which we depend for life. Similarly, the moon also affects life on earth. Water itself is life-giving. Despite modern irrigation techniques, where would we be without rain? Then, shouldn't we respect these occurrences of

nature? They in turn are created and sustained by Bhagwān. Does not Bhagwān then deserve our veneration? We all respect and revere Bhagwān. That is *pujā*. We cannot afford to remain ungrateful towards Him who has graced us in so many ways.

We do Bhagwān's *pujā* to show our reverence for His infinite *krupā* – grace. *Pujā* teaches us how to love Him. It lightens the load of our debt to Him. *Pujā* develops virtues. *Pujā* brings fulfillment.

Why is there a need for a *murti*?

Teenagers hang posters of their favourite sport stars in their rooms. When asked why, they reply, “We admire them! We want to play like them. We are inspired by the posters.”

Similarly, a *murti* (image) kindles virtues such as faith, respect and goal direction in a person.

In the *Mahābhārat*, Eklavya became a skilled archer, just guided and inspired by a *murti* of his guru Dronāchārya.

Guru's *murti* *pujā*

In life we come across statues, portraits and photographs of leaders and statesmen, who have achieved excellence in their respective fields. We are inspired by them. We may choose to follow their footsteps in pursuit of success. However generally, their success is only limited to their particular field. More often, their lives are invariably steeped in the dualities of love and hate, happiness and misery. Such lives are not truly inspiring. According to Bhagwān Shri Krishna in the *Gītā*, the true ideal, is to attain the *Sthitapragna*, or *Gunātīt* state or Bhagwān's *bhakti* (2/25, 14/25, 18/54, respectively). Such inspiration can only be obtained from a spiritual guru – also synonymously known as *Satguru* and *Satpurush*.

Such a guru's *murti* *pujā* is a fundamental injunction in *Sanātan Dharma*'s *shāstras*, since it achieves a spiritual connection with him and Bhagwān.

Need for a guru

A ‘guru’ in simple terms means a teacher. Anybody from whom one learns something, is a guru. The teachers and lecturers in school or college can also be called gurus, though the word *āchārya* is more appropriate for them, while ‘guru’ is specifically reserved for a spiritual master.



Bhagwān Veda Vyās – *Sanātan Dharma*'s *Adi* (first) *Guru*



In Sanskrit, the root *gu* means ignorance or darkness and *ru* means knowledge or light. Therefore one who leads the aspirant from darkness to enlightenment, is a true guru.

In Sanātan Dharma, the importance of a guru is incalculable. Every aspirant needs a guru for guidance on the spiritual path. By his own efforts, the aspirant cannot hope to progress far. The shāstras advise:

*Tad vignānārtham sa gurumewābhigachhet
samit pānihi shrotriyaṁ brahmanishtham.*

– Mundaka Upanishad 1-2-12

– to know the Reality, he (the aspirant) should go with gifts to a guru who is well versed in the Vedas and one who has realised Brahman.

The Upanishads stipulate that the guru should be offered worship in the same manner as Bhagwān:

*Yasya deve parā bhaktiḥ, yathā deve tathā gurau,
Tasyaite kathitā hi arthāḥ, prakāshante mahātmanaha.*

– Shvetāshvatara Upanishad 6/23

– as one offers devotion to the Deity, one should offer devotion to the guru. So decree the wise sages. Therein one will obtain everything there is to obtain.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan on the Guru (Satpurush)

“One who offers equal and intensely loving service to Bhagwān, and His Sadhu, then despite being a most mediocre devotee who is destined to become a great devotee after either two births, four births, ten births or even a hundred births, he can become a great devotee in this very birth. Such is the fruit of equally serving Bhagwān and His Devotee” (Vachanāmṛt Vartāl 5).

Pujā ritual

Pujā means to offer respect. Pujā ritual is the means by which one offers respect. Just as people who are brought up in different cultures have their own ways of offering respect, similarly there are different ways of offering pujā. Over time, these traditional methods of veneration have been woven into the culture’s fabric.

In the military, a high ranking officer is saluted whilst standing in the ‘attention’ position. This is a ritual of respect.

On special occasions, a king, queen or head of state are honoured with a red carpet. This is a form of pujā.

Glory of the guru

*Guru Govind donu khade,
kisko lāgu pāi,
Balihāri Gurudevki
jinhe Govind diyo batāi.*

– The guru and Govind (Paramātmā) both are present before me, to whom shall I bow first? Glory to the guru, since he showed me Govind.

*Gurur Brahmā, gurur Vishnu,
gururdevo Maheshwaraha,
guruhu sākshāt Parambrahma
tasmai shrigurave namaha.*

– Skaud Purāna / Guru Gitā 45

– The guru is Brahmā, Vishnu and Mahesh (Shiva), veneration to the guru who is Parabrahman manifest. The second stanza does not literally mean that the guru is Parabrahman, rather he is venerated as Parabrahman.

‘Profound love for the Satpurush is the only means to ātmā-realisation; the only means to realising the glory and greatness of the Satpurush; and also the only means to realising Bhagwān’.

(Bhagwān Swāminārāyan,
Vachanāmṛt Vartāl 11)



āchmaniya



dhoup (agarbatti)

Smashing a champagne bottle during the launching of a new ship, cake-cutting and blowing out lighted candles in the Western tradition, are forms of *pujā* ritual.

Any ritual of veneration which has become a tradition is *pujā*.

In India, various forms of *pujā* are practised. For example, the *shāstras* have given an injunction, *Atithi devo bhava* – to treat a visitor like a deity. So if a visitor arrives at the doorstep, without any previous notification, he is to be welcomed like a deity.

In ancient times, the *atithi* was initially welcomed with sweet sentiments. Then he was proffered cool water for washing and to quench his thirst. This would be followed by

Shodshopchār *pujā*

1. *āhavān* invitation, invocation
2. *āsana* offering a seat e.g. mat, etc.
3. *pādya* washing the feet with water
4. *arghya* imprinting *chāndlo* with kumkum and rice on the forehead
5. *āchaman* offering water
6. *snān* bathing him with water
7. *vastra* offering rich garments
8. *upavit* offering *janoi* (sacred thread)
9. *gandha* sprinkling perfume
10. *dhoup* burning incense to make the air fragrant
11. *deep* illuminating the area by lighting a *divo* (cotton wick immersed in ghee)
12. *naivedya* offering rich foods and sweets
13. *ārti* waving *divās* in a circular motion
14. *pradakshinā* circumambulating the person or *murti*
15. *pushpānjali* offering flowers and garlands
16. *rājopchār* offering an umbrella, wisp, wooden footwear (*pādukā*) and other similar items; and then please Bhagwān or person by melodiously singing and playing musical instruments

food. If the person seemed to be worthy of greater veneration, kumkum powder and a few rice-grains would be applied on his forehead. He would then be garlanded, given clothes, and according to contemporary custom, would also be offered rich gifts, such as milk, ghee and grains. The host would then recite Sanskrit (the commonly spoken language then) *shlokas* to convey his warm-hearted sentiments for the guest. In this way, a coalescence of sentiments and actions were imparted. This was the precursor of *panchopchār* (performing *pujā* with five *dravyas*), *dashopchār* (ten *dravyas*) and *shodshopchār* *pujā* (sixteen *dravyas* – shown opposite). The type chosen depended on the status of the guest. *Shodshopchār* *pujā* was more commonly practised.

Today, to a lesser or greater extent, in one form or another, we still follow the above practice to welcome guests. Only the names of the ritual have changed.

If we welcome home an ordinary guest, then would a *bhakta* be restrained from showering his love, when a divine personage like Bhagwān Himself graces his home? Therefore with the aid of *shodshopchār* and recitation of Sanskrit mantras, Bhagwān is venerated. It is this ancient Hindu tradition which is termed *pujā* ritual.

FAQs

Why are incense sticks burnt during *pujā* rituals?

Dhoop is one of the sixteen ways of offering worship to a deity, known as *shodshopchār* *pujā*. This involves burning fragrant substances such as *agarbatti* (incense sticks), camphor, *loban*, *guggal*, *kasturi* (musk), *chandan* (sandalwood) and *shallaki* (olibanum). These substances possess certain properties which purify the air and induce good or positive vibrations in the brain. This helps a person concentrate more easily during meditation or a *pujā* ritual.

A philosophical moral of the burning incense stick is that, just as it burns away to ashes while simultaneously pervading the air with fragrance, an aspirant should sacrifice his life to serve others and mould it such that its fragrance inspires others.



sandalwood shavings



olibanum (shallaki)



muskdana (kasturi)



loban



guggal



bathing with panchāmrut



grinding chandan paste from sandalwood



asopalav



tulsi



mango

bili (bael)

betel vine



peepal

Pujā dravyas

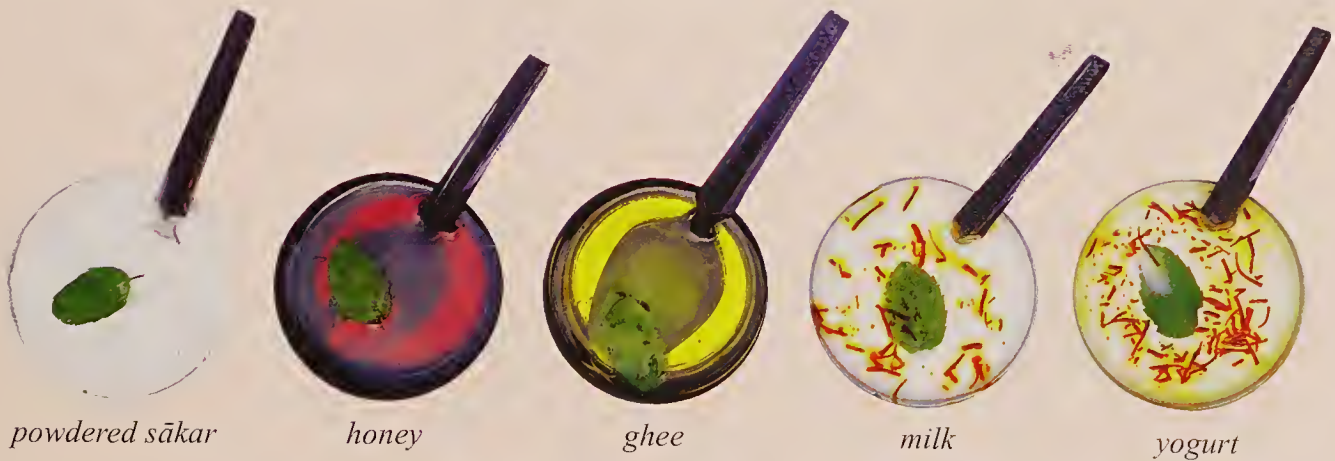
Auspicious substances used to perform puja:

1. *Panchāmrut* – mixture of five substances for bathing the *murti* – milk, yogurt, ghee, honey and *sākar* (powdered sugar) (see opposite page).
2. For *archan* (imprinting) – *kumkum* (red powder), *abir* (white powder), *gulāl* (pink powder), *chandan* (sandalwood paste) and *sindur* (orange powder)
3. Cloth for *āsana* – red and white are considered auspicious. Sometimes yellow is also used. Black is never used in any sacred Hindu ritual, because it is considered inauspicious
4. Grains and pulses – wheat, barley, rice, mungbeans and sesame seeds (*til*), are most common.
5. Leaves – *tulsi*, betel vine, *asopalav*, *bili* (*bael/bilva*), mango, *peepal*, *durvā* and banana.
6. Coconut (*shrifal*) and arecanut (*sopāri* / *poogifalam*).
7. *Nādā chhadi* (*rakshāsutra*) – to be tied on the *shrifal*, *kalash* and the *yajmān*'s right wrist. Tying the *nādā chhadi* signifies that the vessel or individual is bound by blessings (*āshirvād*).
8. *Kalash* – copper pot for holding sanctified water and the *shrifal* surrounded by leaves such as: mango, *asopalav*, betel vine, *peepal* and *umbaro*. When the *umbaro* is not available, the leaf of the *shami* is considered equally auspicious (see p.406).
9. Flowers (see p.263).
10. *Dhoop* – incense sticks, *loban*, *guggal*, *chandan*, *kasturi*, *shallaki*, etc. (see previous page).
11. *Deep* (*divo* / *diyā*) – lighted wick using ghee (see p.383).
12. *Ārti* – waving lighted wicks (see p.43).
13. *Ghanta* or *ghantadi* – a small bell with a handle, to be rung every so often during rituals and *ārti*.

Pujā dravyas



Panchāmrut



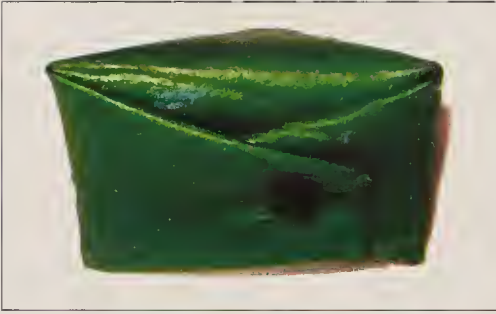
Types of offerings (*naivedya*)

The following simple, traditional foods are offered in some common *pujā* and *kathā* rituals performed at home.

1. Jaggery and coriander seeds (*dhānā*) – a traditional offering during any auspicious ritual and an inauguration *pujā* ritual.
2. *Shiro* – a sweet, cooked using wheat flour, sugar and milk with cardamom and saffron for flavouring. Usually offered after a discourse (*kathā*) e.g. *Satyanārāyan kathā*.
3. *Panchāmrut* – ref. no.1 above in *pujā dravyas*.
4. *Pendā* – a sweet made from milk solids and sugar.
5. Dry fruits, fresh fruits.
6. Coconut chips sprinkled with sugar.
7. Groundnuts and *sākar*.
8. Groundnuts coated with sugar candy.

Numbers 4 to 8, are also offered after a *pārāyan* during the Shrāvan month.

9. *Mukhwās* – a special mixture of spices and herbs to be chewed or in a betel leaf – which acts as a carminative. *Mukhwās* usually consists of: clove, cardamom, *sopāri* shavings, *kātho* (catechu), lime, menthol & mint fragrance, powdered rose petals, *gulkand*, fennel (*variyaḷi*), coriander *dāl*, sesame seeds, etc.



pān



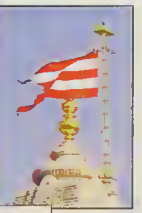
kumkum used in south India.

It has a darker hue than the normal bright red vermillion used in northern India

Pujā on other occasions

In Sanātan Dharma, *pujan* (ritual of reverence) is performed of a new object before using it, such as a car, a refrigerator, a camera, and so on, etc. Such *pujan* is usually performed using kumkum by chanting a few mantras. A more devotional ritual called Mahāpujā, is performed for a new house and business premises (see Ch.5).

Pujan is also performed during ground-breaking to sanctify the area and the land (see Ch.21 – Shilānyās). For a new building, Vāstu *pujan* is performed (see Ch.22). Rather than cutting a red ribbon, before entering, a knot in a *nādā chhadi* or a golden chain is untied. This ritual was first introduced and is promoted by Pramukh Swami Mahārāj.



Types of Offerings (Naivedyam)



shiro



coconut chips & sākar



nuts



bananas, ghee & sugar



jaggery & coriander



mukhwās



pendā

સ.ગોપાલાનંદ સ્વામીએ આપેલ મહાપૂજનું પથાણું



5. Mahāpujā (Grand worship ritual)

- History of Mahāpujā
- Glory of Mahāpujā
- Legacy
- Mahāpujā rituals

Bhāratvarsh's *samskruti* (culture) is a *yagna samskruti*. In Sanātan Dharma's Vedic period, there prevailed the yagna ritual of the sacred fire (see Ch.15 – Yagna). Through this ritual, devotees offered devotion to the devas, to appease and thank them for their benevolence on mankind. To repay debt to the *devas*, the Vedic rishis formulated *nitya* or *naimittik yagnas* in the daily lives of the people. The *nitya yagna* was performed daily, while the *naimittik*, for a specific desire. Over time, as population and activity increased, the rishis foresaw that not everybody was able to perform yagnas daily. For them, they enjoined *nitya pujā* as an alternative. From this evolved a more elaborate morning *pujā* ritual, which involved welcoming and devotionally offering *shodshopchār pujā* to one's worshipful deity (*ārādhya deva*).

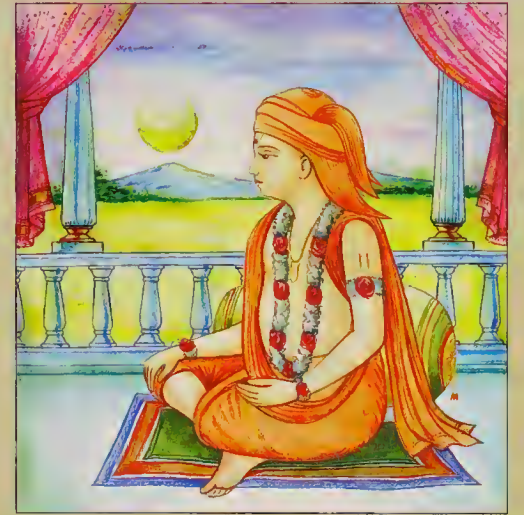
This Vedic *pujā* ritual prescribed by the rishis, forms the basic framework of the Mahāpujā of the Swāminārāyan sampradāya. Mahāpujā differs from the *nitya pujā* performed daily by devotees. *Nitya pujā* involves *dhyāna*, *mānsi pujā*, *mantra japa*, *pradakshinā*, *dandvat* and *prārthnā*. Through these, devotees offer worship to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and His Gunātīt successors. The Mahāpujā invokes Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, His Gunātīt successors, as well as Aksharmuktas, and offers them *shodshopchār pujā*.

History of Mahāpujā

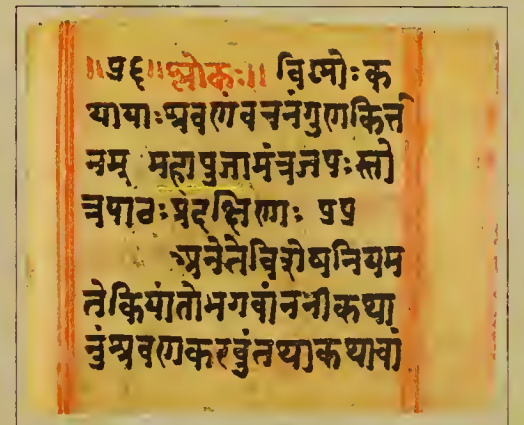
The first reference of Mahāpujā in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, is in the Shikshāpatri (77), in which Bhagwān Swāminārāyan enjoins devotees to perform Mahāpujā as a special vow during Shrāvan. However, the first Mahāpujā was performed on Jeth *sud* 11 Samvat 1886 (2/6/1830) in Gadhadā by Gopālānand Swami. This was the day after Bhagwān Swāminārāyan returned to Akshardhām. Swami performed the Mahāpujā in front of Gopināth Deva, in the mandir, to solace the grief-stricken Dādā Khāchar, at whose darbar Bhagwān Swāminārāyan spent 28 years. After this first Mahāpujā, it went into dormancy.



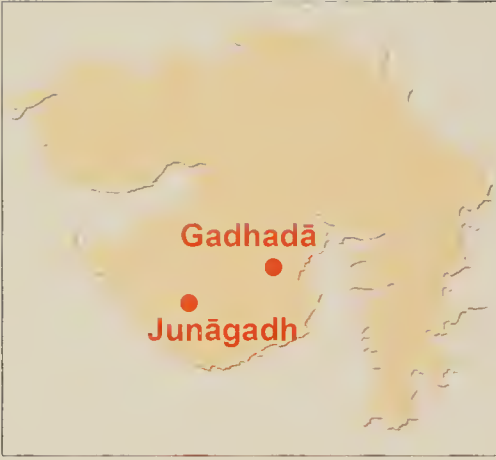
महापूजा



Gopālānand Swami

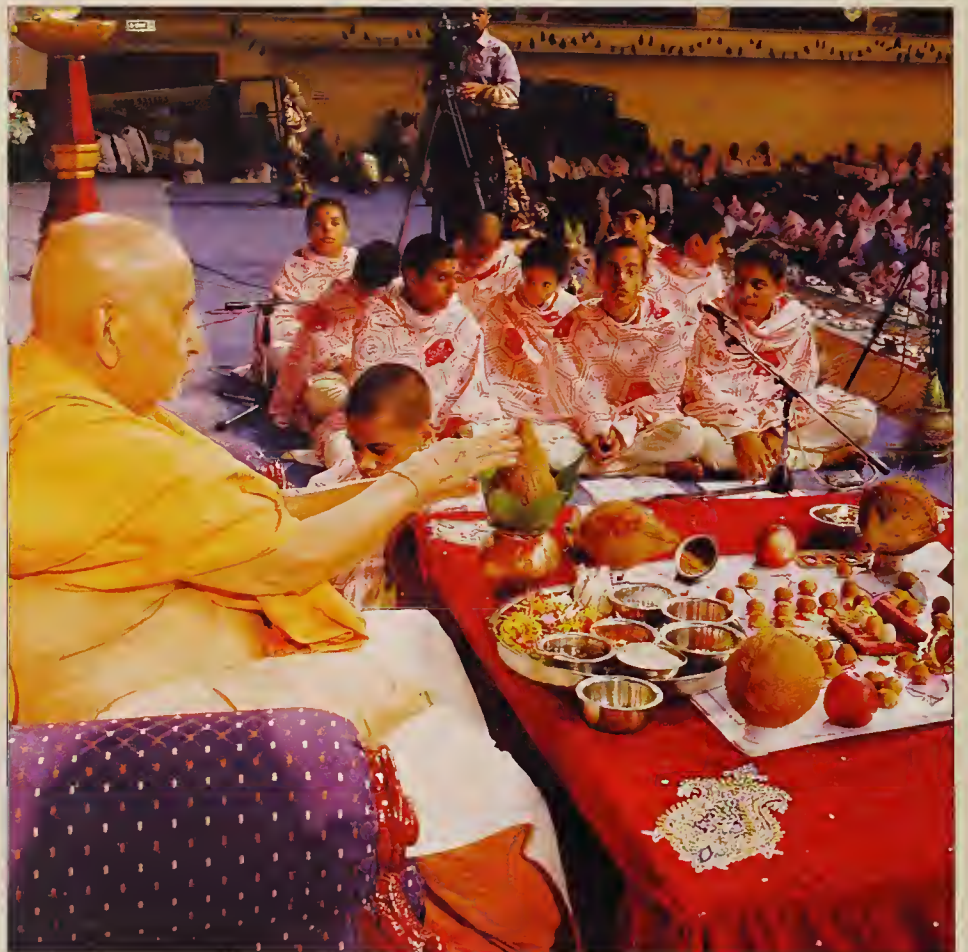


opp. page: The original yantrapatal of Mahāpujā drawn by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's scholar paramhansa, Swami Gopālānand (preserved in the Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Junāgad).



Fifteen years later, in Samvat 1901 (1845), Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami requested Gopālānand Swami to perform Mahāpujā in the Junāgadh mandir, to improve the livelihood and eradicate the mundane misery of devotees in Sorath (area surrounding Junāgadh).

A stalwart of Vedic rituals, Gopālānand Swami drew up a *Yantrapatal* (diagram) for the Mahāpujā. Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami then appointed his scholar disciple, Vasudevanand Brahmachāri, to perform the first Mahāpujā on Jeth *sud* 11, Samvat 1901. This was exactly fifteen years after the first Mahāpujā and after Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's return to Akshardhām. On this occasion, Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami extolled immense glory of the Mahāpujā. He declared that those who have Mahāpujā performed, will have all their auspicious wishes fulfilled by Paramātmā. Gopālānand Swami too said, "Here in Junāgadh, resides Gunātītānand Swami, Shri Hari's Akshardhām manifest. Therefore those who have Mahāpujā performed here, will be relieved from all mental and physical miseries and poverty, and their auspicious wishes will be fulfilled."



*children conducting Mahāpujā, Shri
Swāminārāyan Mandir, Neasden,
London (4th September 2004)*

Henceforth, by Gunātitānand Swami's command, his disciple Vasudevanand Brahmachāri and his successor Brahmachāri Achintyānandji, continued to do the Mahāpujā daily.

Glory of Mahāpujā

This is described in Sanskrit:

*Sarva kashta nirvuttyartham sukha samruddhi hetave.
grah dosh vināshāya karma pidoshāntaye.
Kāma dugdheva sarvadā Gopāl Muni preritā,
sarvadā shraddhayā kāryā, mahāpujā susiddhidā.*

– one should do Mahāpujā for: relieving pains, prosperity, circumventing *grahdosh* (planetary misery) and for peace from the pain of one's karmas. Inspired by Gopālānand Swami, like the *Kāmadhenu* cow, the Mahāpujā, which will grant all *siddhis* and should be performed permanently with faith.



Aksharbrahman Gunātitānand Swami



balaks and adults performing Mahāpujā, London

Legacy

In this manner, Mahāpujā originated in Junāgad. Gradually it began to be performed in other mandirs.

Shāstriji Mahārāj then commenced the Mahāpujā in Akshar Deri, the sacred shrine on Gunātītānand Swami's cremation site in Gondal, Saurashtra. He showed Yogiji Mahārāj how to perform it and then commanded him to do it everyday (Ishwarcharandas 1989 III:719). Yogiji Mahārāj always exuberantly extolled Mahāpujā's glory to devotees.

In the BAPS sadhu training centre in Sārangpur, Mahāpujā is taught to all sadhus. It is also performed every morning after *mangalā ārti* in all *shikharbaddh* mandirs by sadhus, and in most Hari mandirs by the *gruhastha pujāris*. Its duration is about 1.5 hours. It is also performed by sadhus as part of Vāstu pujā for devotees buying a new home, business or factory (see Ch.22 – Vāstu Pujā). It was taught to the Bāl Mandal in London in 2003 and that of Surat in 2006 (India). These children performed the Mahāpujā rituals with meticulous and strikingly clear and correct Sanskrit pronunciations. They felt proud to be the first group of children in the sansthā to perform something so pristine, devotional and difficult. It boosted their self esteem and spiritual fortitude.

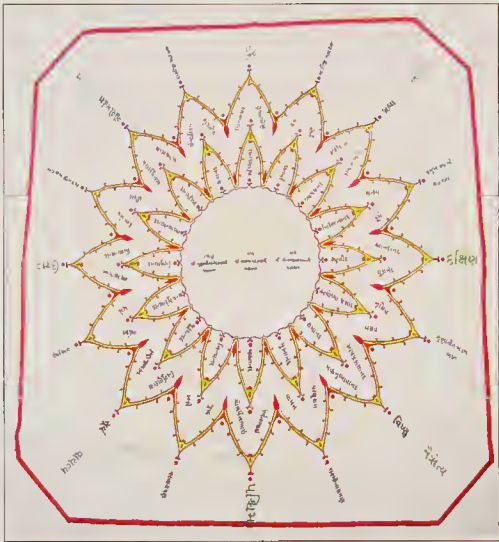
Mahāpujā rituals

The Mahāpujā involves the following Vedic rituals and mantras: *shāntipāth*, *swastivāchan*, *kankan bandhan*, *devābhivandan*, *nyāsvidhi*, *kalashpujan*, *āhawān-sthāpan* and *shodshopchār pujā*. This is followed by Janmangal Nāmāvali Pāth – reciting the 108 divine names of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan (see Ch.20).

During the pujā, the following are invoked and offered worship:

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami, Gopālānand Swami at the centre. Around them, in a circular placement, the following are also invoked: Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's *paramhansas*, exalted devotees and Akshar muktas, Rādhā-Krishna, Lakshmi-Nārāyan, Nār-Nārāyan, Gauri-Mahesh (Shiva-Pārvati), Vishnu, Surya, Ganpati, other avatārs and devas.

Thus the Mahāpujā is unique to the Swāminārāyan sampradāya. Through the Mahāpujā, devotees experience immense spiritual solace when beset by mundane problems and vicissitudes; a surefire stress buster and spiritual booster.



“Mahāpujā is the essence of yagna.”

– Pramukh Swami Mahārāj



જય હિન્દ રાજકોટ, સોમવાર, તા. ૨૯-૫-૨૦૦૬

ભગવાનને રિઝવવા રાજકોટ ખાતે નાના-નાના બાળકોએ
જાતે જ વૈદીક મહાપૂજા યજ્ઞ કરી સૌને મંત્રમુગ્ધ કર્યા
પ્રમુખસ્વામીએ બાળપ્રવૃત્તિ દ્વારા વૈદીક પરંપરા જીવંત રાખી છે-કમલેશ જોશીપુરા

News headline in 'Jay Hind' (Rajkot), published on Monday 29/5/2006, about
BAPS children performing Vedic mahāpujā and thus mesmerizing the
participants.



children of Surat Bāl Mandal performing Mahāpujā for world peace in Rajkot,
Saurashtra, 29th May 2006





6. Ārti (Waving lighted wicks)



- Ārti – ritual & sentiments
- bell, drum and conch shell sounded during ārti
- After ārti, why is water from a conch-shell sprinkled around the ārti
- Why do people put money in the ārti when taking āskās
- The prescribed manner for performing ārti
- Ārti in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

Ārti – ritual & sentiments

As we saw earlier in Ch.4, puṇjā is a ritual to offer respect to and welcome Bhagwān. When guests come home, do we seat them in the dark? We quickly switch on extra lights. Similarly, ārti is a symbol of welcoming Bhagwān. Only through the light (*prakāsh*) of knowledge (of His glory) can one welcome Bhagwān in one's heart. The symbol of this knowledge is light. Only in the light can one have Bhagwān's darshan.

Therefore, ārti is the ritual that welcomes Bhagwān with light. It is also defined in the shāstras:

Asamantāt ratihi

– O Bhagwān! Let my total love be for You only.

Ārti is the prayer offered with such sentiments.

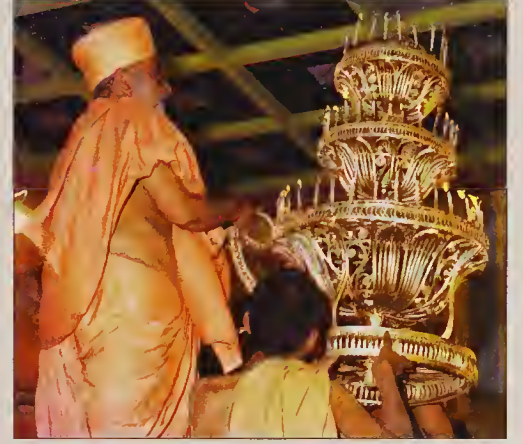
In ancient mandirs of India, hardly any daylight reached the inner recesses of the *garbha gruha*. The darshan of Bhagwān was made possible with *divās*. To have the darshan of all parts of Bhagwān, the *divās* were held near each part.

The *bhakta's* inherent feelings about ārti are: “Just as one can have the darshan of Bhagwān by the flame of the ārti, let me have love for Your divine self.”

There is also another sentiment in this ritual, “just as the wick of the *divo* burns in the ārti, let my body burn away in Your service. Not only that, but to keep the flame of service burning, let there be an abundance of oil in the form of Divine love, and so let my love be sacrificed in Your service.”

Yet Bhagwān has graced all life on earth by the gift of the *panchbhutas* – the five elements (see below). To maintain stability He created *pruthvi* – the earth. He gave *jal* or water

आरती



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj performing mahā ārti, on Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's Bicentenary, 12th April, 1981, Amdavad



darshan with diyā



simple ārti on a banyan leaf

opp. page: evening mahā ārti of Gangāji, in Kāshi (Banaras).



ārti with diyā



ārti with chāmar



ārti with cloth



blowing shankh during ārti

for life to flourish. He gave *tej* – light in the form of sunlight and moonlight, as well as *agni* – fire to cook food and the *jathar agni* – digestive fire to digest food. He also gave *vāyu* – air as a medium for breathing and for holding *prāna* – the vital air. For movement He gave *avakāsh-ākāsh* – space or ether. To remember our debt to Paramātmā, we present the *panchbhutas* at His feet in *ārti*, by offering their symbolic representations.

Sound is a part of *ākāsh* or space. Therefore the drum, bell and the words (lyrics) sung in *ārti* are symbols of *ākāsh*. The *dhoop* or smoke from an incense stick is a symbol of *vāyu*. The flame of a *diyā* is a symbol of *tej* (light). The water in the conch shell is a symbol of *jal* (water). By doing the *dandvat pranām* the *pruthvi* (earth) element is symbolically offered at Paramātmā's lotus feet. In this manner, *ārti* is a symbolic offering of the *panchbhutas* to Paramātmā.

In some mandirs, the *ārti* is performed using five objects which symbolically represent the *panchbhutas*:

- 1) flower – *pruthvi* (because smell is an attribute of *pruthvi*)
- 2) water in a conch shell – *jal*.
- 3) *divā* / *diyā* – *tej*
- 4) *chāmar* (wisp) – *vāyu*.
- 5) white cloth – *ākāsh*.

By performing *ārti* using these articles in the above sequence, people feel that they have offered the *panchbhutas* at Paramātmā's feet.

Bell, drum and conch shell sounded during *ārti*

There has always been a deep tie between man's emotions and music. When a man gains something invaluable, or when he attains success in a particular field, to express his boundless joy he either runs around telling his friends or starts dancing or clapping. People in ancient times also resorted to such mannerisms. Over time, especially in religious matters, the joy was expressed in a grander and aesthetic manner using the bell, drum, *zālar* (small brass gong) and *shankh* (conch shell).

The *bhakta* also becomes jubilant on meeting Paramātmā. To express his joy, he is drawn into making auspicious sounds called *nād* with such instruments.

Such *nād* also has an effect on the immediate vicinity. Rhythm affects people in different ways. A military band arouses a fighting spirit. Rock or disco music galvanizes youths to dance wildly. Classical music induces a reflective mood that has a soothing effect. In this way different rhythms and sounds have their own unique effects on the brain and body. All mundane (*māyic*) thoughts are overcome by such auspiciousness and the *bhakta* coalesces into the Divine. The collective *nād* of the bell, *zālar* and drum also creates a *māṅgalik* (auspicious) environment. It spreads Paramātmā's glory everywhere.

To hail Paramātmā's presence, and to create a divine environment conducive to *ārti* and *pujā*, the *zālar*, *shankh* and drum are sounded.

Water from a conch-shell sprinkled around the *ārti*

In Sanātan Dharma, Varuna deva is the deity of water. The Purāṇs declare that Varuna's security, in guarding anything is unmatched. Nobody can get past him. When the *ārti*'s revolutions on Paramātmā's divine form are completed, the *jyot* (flame) of the *ārti* is suffused with divinity. To retain this divinity, water (symbolic of Varuna) from the *shankh* is poured clockwise three times around the *ārti*.

Then the devotee places both his hands above the *jyot* of the *ārti* and then brings them towards his eyes and head to make a slight contact (*sparsh*). This procedure is known as 'taking the *āskā*'. The underlying meaning of 'taking the *āskā*' is that one transfers Bhagwān's divinity from the *jyot* of the *ārti* into one's inner self, to boost the divinity within.

The water in the *shankh* is also considered sacred and then sprinkled on devotees (see pp.266-267).

Money in the *ārti* when 'taking' *āskā*

By 'taking *āskā*', a devotee is hallowed by Bhagwān's divinity. To express his gratitude: he donates money to Him.



sprinkling water around the *ārti*



'taking' *āskā*



donating money in the *ārti*

The prescribed manner for performing *ārti*

There are varied ways of performing the actual physical ritual of *ārti*. One prescribed method in the *shāstras* is:

ādaṁ chatuḥ pāda talaikadeshe dwau nābhi deshe
sukruta asya mandale sarvāṅgdesheṣhu cha saptavāram
devārtikam bhaktajanaha prakuryāt.

– the devotee should perform *ārti* of the Deva in this manner: four *āvartans* (revolutions – the arm holding the *ārti* should move clockwise in a circular and vertical plane) at the lotus feet, then two at the navel, once over the face and finally, seven times around the whole body (Harilāmṛutam 6/4/6). In Sanskrit, *ārti* is called *nirājanam*, meaning: to fully illuminate Paramātmā's *murti*. From the method described above, the meaning of *nirājanam* can be visualised.

Ārti in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

Muktānand Swami, one of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's eight poet paramhansas, composed the evening *ārti* in Kālvāni, on Kārtik *sud* 10, Ashādhī Samvat 1859 (5th November 1802).

The following is a translation of this *ārti*:

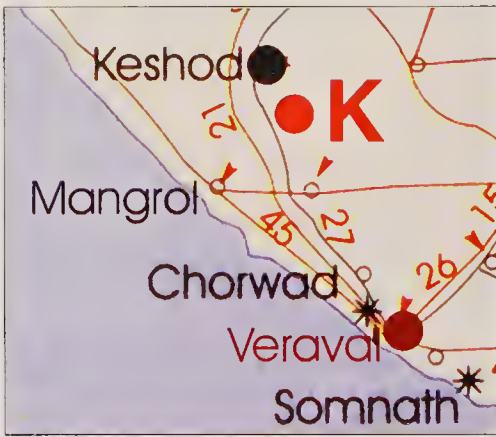
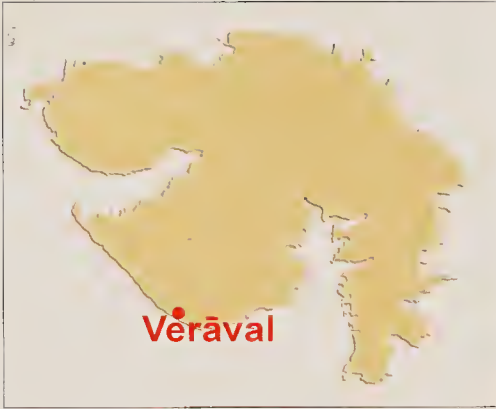
Hail Sadguru Sahajānand Swami ! Hail Sadguru Swami !
Merciful Sahajānand, Almighty, with many names....
At Your lotus-feet, hands together, I bow to You, (and)
Bow my head at Your feet, by which all my miseries are
smashed.....(1)

O Nārāyan ! Saviour of sadhus, you took human birth as a
Brahmin,
Uplifted countless downtrodden, befallen men and
women.....(2)

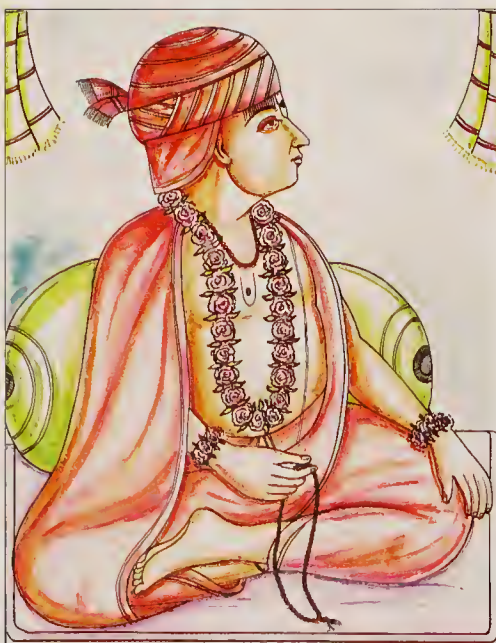
O Indestructible ! You perform fresh *lilā* every day,
At whose feet lie 68 tirths, crores of Kāshis and
Gayas.....(3)

O Purushottam manifest ! Your darshan will lead to freedom
from *kāl*, karma and one will be redeemed with his
whole family.....(4)

O Ocean of mercy! During this incarnation, You have
showered immense compassion,
Says Muktānand, by making moksha so easy.....(5)
Hail Sadguru Swami !



K – Kālvāni



Muktānand Swami



samnyāsi pūjari performing ārti in the Shri Jagannāth Mandir, Amdavad



evening mahā ārti of Gangāji, Harkipedhi, Haridwār



7. Prasādam (Sanctified offerings)

- Factors influencing the types of prasādam
- Types of prasādam in Hindu tirths
- Shaiva shrines
- Vaishnava shrines
- Shākta shrines
- Prasādam in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

Besides the solacing darshan of the deities, another equally solacing aspect of a Hindu shrine or mandir is its traditional *prasādam*. This is sanctified food after offering to the deities. It is either handed out by the *pujāri* at the inner sanctum or available nearby in the mandir precinct. Devotees intensely venerate *prasādam*, since they believe it sanctifies them. Since the deity's *murti* cannot be touched, its divinity pervaded in the food offered is regarded equally sanctifying.

In Sanskrit food offered to the deity is known as *naivedyam* – ‘that which is fit to be offered.’ In Pushti Mārg Vaishnavism, the food offered is known as *bhog*, ‘that which is enjoyed.’

However people generally tend to synonymously use the word *prasādam* for any food offered to the deity, as well as after offering. More correctly, it becomes *prasādam* only after offering and after the deity has partaken of it. When devotees lovingly offer anything to Paramātmā, He is pleased. Out of His pleasure, He graces devotees by returning a part of it. Hindus sincerely believe this. On occasions, Paramātmā even leaves evidence that He has partaken of the food. Some items of food decrease in quantity. During Annakut, such miracles occasionally occur in some of the BAPS Swāminārāyan mandirs. Such occurrences are Paramātmā's way of acknowledging the devotees' exuberant bhakti and boosting their faith in Paramātmā's presence in *murtis*.

As cited earlier in Ch.3, on 21st September 1995, the miracle of milk drinking by Ganeshji, Nandi and other deities worldwide, is one such instance which Hindus and non-Hindus witnessed first hand. Reporters recorded and transmitted this miracle on T.V.

In the next few pages, with the aid of photographs, we glean the types of *prasādam* available in the major shrines, with a description of the *prasādam*. However several aspects about *prasādam* are worth discussing here, which shed light on the reasons underlying the nature of the *prasādam* in a particular region.

प्रसादम्



*Annakut offerings,
BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir;
Amdavad (2005)*

*opp. page: Annakut offered to Shri
Dwārkādhish in Dwārkā*

Factors influencing the types of prasādam

Prior to the advent of mechanised and faster transportation in the late 19th century, pilgrims walked to *tirths*. Hence pilgrimages invariably meant lengthy time periods; from a few months to perhaps a year or more. A *yātrik* from south India visiting Badrināth and other shrines in the Himalayas would probably return home about a year later. Therefore the *prasādam* available in the major *tirths* generally satisfied the following criteria:

1. lightweight and occupying minimum volume.
2. wrapped in a way which was as gheeproof and waterproof as possible. This prevented spoiling the rest of the *yātrik*'s baggage. The *prasādam* remained dry during the monsoon.
3. well preserved or naturally stable enough to remain edible for long periods and not be susceptible to staling and moulding, especially in damp, climatic conditions.
4. nutritious, in case the *yātrik* needed to survive on it for a day when he could not procure food on the return journey.

Besides these four factors, the type of *prasādam* from a particular region of India also provides interesting information about the local agriculture and the prevailing religious, social and culinary customs and traditions.

Types of prasādam in Hindu tirths

Generally the major *tirths* can be classified into Shaiv, Vaishnava and Shākta.

Shaiva shrines

These comprise of the 12 Jyotirlings, dedicated to Shri Mahādevaji (Shiva). Generally *prasādam* available in these are non-edible such as bili leaves, *bhabhut* or *vibhuti* (sacred ash) and flowers. Shaivite devotees also often offer coconut (*shrifal*) to the Shivaling. The *pujāri* cracks and offers the coconut to the deity and returns half of it to the *bhakta*. The *bhabhut* is either smeared or touched on one's eyes and forehead. Edible *prasādam* such as lādus of wheat are also available in some of the Jyotirlings, such as Somnāth. In Parli Vaijyanāth *prasādam* of roasted *mamrā*, white sugar crystals, *sākar*, *patāsā* and *chanā* is also available. In Baidyanāth (Bihar), the *prasādam* is *bergutta* – powdered, dried berry



Parli Vaijyanāth Jyotirling (Maharashtra)



patāsā, *sākar*, roasted *mamrā*, white and coloured *sākariā*, roasted *chanā*

(*Zizifus jujuba*) with added *sākar*, which is very tasty. The dry nature of this *prasādam* and sugar both act as a preservative.

Vaishnava shrines

The *prasādam* of Shri Krishna's shrines in Dwarkā, Dākor and Nāthdwārā, is traditionally *mathadi thor* (ઠેર). *Mathadis* are small, fried, wheat *puris*, which are soaked in sugar syrup and dried. In Dwarkā and Dākor, *magas lādus* are also offered. *Magas* is gram flour cooked in ghee, to which sugar is added. The sugar or syrup acts as a natural preservative. The traditional *thor* of Shrināthji is a large, thick wheat roti (see photo p.57), fried in ghee, and then immersed in syrup and then dried. *Prasādam* from the daily *chhappan bhog* – 56 foods offered to the deity, is generally available to the *pujāris* of the shrine (see photo p.57). The uncommonly huge size of the sweets reflects the lavish bhakti offered to Shri Krishna in Dākor and Nāthdwārā.

In Jagannāth Puri, both sweet and spiced rice are the usual *prasādam* available in small clay pots known as *bhān*.



Shākta shrines

Of the 51 Shakti Piths, the *prasād* of Ambāji in north Gujarat is shown on p.54. Its salient feature is that along with the edible *prasād*, a *chundadi* (sacred piece of cloth) and *kunkum* are also given to devotees.



Dwarkādhish – (Dwarkā, Saurashtra, Gujarat)



mathadi & magas lādus



tulsi leaves, sākar, groundnuts, kamal kākadi & sākariā



Ranchhodrai – (Dākor, Gujarat)



part of chhappan bhog (56 foods)



lādus of magas

*Prasādam of Jagannāth mandir
(Puri, Orissa)*



*tulsi leaves, mathadi thor, puri, jalebi
sukhadi, in traditional palm leaf basket*



*dried cooked rice sewn in finger-sized
cloth bags*



*Rāmeshwaram mandir (Tamil Nadu)
– holy water, tulsi and red chandan
are given as prasādam in the
Anjaneya (Hanumān) shrine at the
main entrance into the mandir.*



*Sri Venkateshwar Bālāji mandir
(Tirumālā hills, south India)*

In addition, *prasādam* of *pāyas* (rice pudding), and mixed vegetables is also available in Anand bazaar, inside the mandir campus. The vegetables include: pumpkin, drumsticks, unripe banana, sweet potato, white *aalu*, all cooked in ghee. Dry *prasādam* of *mathadi* and *sukhadi* (of wheat flour and sugar), is also available in small baskets made of palm leaves, handwoven by local people, which adds to their daily income.

Jagannāthji's traditional *prasādam* in Amdavad is *mālpudā* – wheat roti sweetened with jaggery, fried in ghee, and *bundi* – sweet, fried balls of gram flour and *gānthiā* (fried, spiced snack of gram flour) (see p.55). This is wrapped in dried leaves tied with a piece of white cloth .

In the majority of shrines in south India, there is less emphasis on edible *prasādam*. However in some places, camphor water used during *pujā* of the deity, is sprinkled by the *pujāri* on the heads of *bhaktas* at the sanctum. In other shrines, a *mngat* (crown) of the deity is also momentarily placed on the *bhakta's* head by the *pujāri*. This ritual solaces devotees as equally as *prasādam*. In Padmanābh the *pujāri* offers a dab of wet chandan from the *murti* to devotees, which they apply on their forehead or chest.

South India's greatest shrine, of Venkateshwar Bālāji, in Tirumālā hills, is famous for its large *bundi* lādus, spiced with whole cardamom, packed in plastic bags with *sākar* crystals. A packet is also available containing sanctified *pujā dravyas* of: coloured powders (kumkum, etc.), dried *chandan* sticks, yellow *chandan* discs, a string and fragrant ash.



lādus of bundi



*pujā dravyas of coloured powders,
string, chandan sticks and fragrant ash*

In some *tirths*, the food items or *pujā dravyas* for offering, are available in shops and stalls near the shrine. Devotees buy these and offer it to the *pujāri* of the shrine, who offers this to the deity and returns it as *prasādam* to the devotees.

In the shrines located in the Himalayas, the traditional *prasādam* is a mixture of roasted *mamrā* (inflated rice), *sākariā* and *patāsā*. Vaishno Devi's *prasādam* also includes dried pieces of apples, the fruit commonly growing in the cold climate of the Himalayan foothills. Recently, *prasādam* for the Badrināth shrine, of *lādus* is being made by the local womenfolk using local produce such as *kuttu* (buckwheat), *chulai* (amaranthus) and *jhangora* (millet). To wrap the *lādus*, plastic bags are now replaced by baskets which are handwoven by Ruria women using local varieties of grass. About 20 Bhutia families in Saldhar village, 50 km from Badrināth, make *lādus* for the Badrināth mandir. This provides them a permanent employment opportunity.

Prasādam in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

The traditional *prasādam* in all Swāminārāyan mandirs is small *lādus* of *magas*, famously known as *Swāminārāyan ladudis*. The standard size of a *lādudi* in BAPS Swāminārāyan mandirs is about 2 cm in diameter. In the afternoon, after *utthāpan* – awakening of the deities at 4 p.m., the fresh seasonal fruit offered to the deities is distributed as *prasādam* to those present in the mandir campus.

The *magas* is made of gram (*chanā*) flour cooked in ghee, to which ground sugar and *elāichi* powder are added. The *lādudis* are hand 'rolled' into balls by devotees.



Swāminārāyan 'lādudis' – small *lādus* of *magas*

Prasādam of
Vaishno Devi (Jammu)

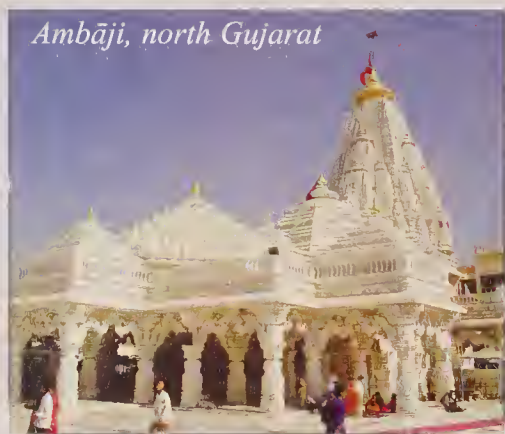


walnut, *sākariā*, dried apple, *sākar*,
mamrā (puffed rice)



sindur, rice, kumkum, mahendi,
chundadi, aalta, bindi, coin, roll of
nādā chhadi, kangan, cardamom
& cloves

Prasādam in the major shrines of India



Ambāji, north Gujarat



mohanthāl



chundadi

kumkum

sākariā & sweet balls



Badrināth



tulasi, chandan & dried petals



kharek

sākariā

sākār

patāsa

makhania

chanā dal



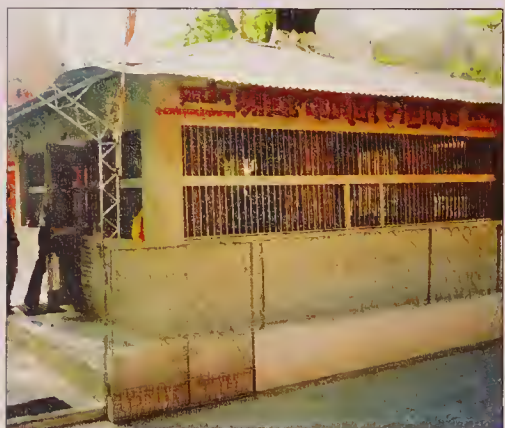
Shri Krishna and family
(Bet Dwarkā, Saurashtra, Gnjarat)



bundi

lādus

fried, spiced wheat gānthiā



Bilkeshwar Mahādeva, Kankhal,
Haridwār



bili fruit

sākariā

fruit of dhaturu plant



Guruvāyurappan, Kerala



left: khir (cooked rice, jaggery and ghee), right: sugar crystals



*Jagannāthji
Jagannāth mandir (Amdavad)*



bundi, gānthiā & mālpuvā

*bundi – fried globules of gram flour
soaked in sugar syrup.
gānthiā – fried sticks of spiced gram
flour.
mālpuvā – rotis of spiced wheat
flour sweetened with
jaggery, fried in ghee.*



Kāshi Vishwanath Mahādeva, Kāshi



*bibhuti (sanctified fragrant ash)
& sindur*



*red halvā, sweet made from tapkhir
(centre) & other sweets*



Kedārnāth



*groundnuts, khārek, makhaniā,
dried coconut chips, sākhar*



abhishek water & tulsi leaves



*Sree Padmanābhswāmy mandir,
Trivendram, Kerala*



*uniapam – fried rice vadā, sugar
crystals*



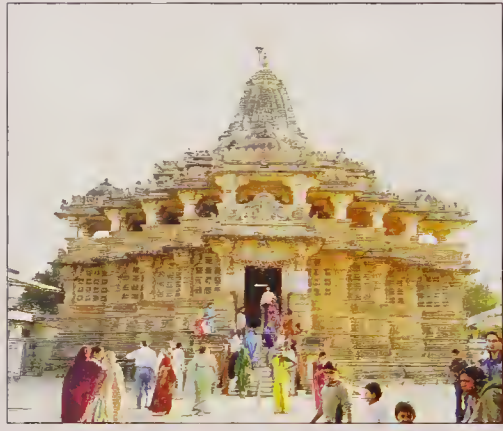
Panchamritham



*Brahmāji
(Pushkar, Rajasthan)*



*walnut, sākariā, groundnuts, kharek
(dried dates), sākhar, patāsā (sugar
candy), dried coconut chips*



*Shamlāji (Shri Krishna)
(Sabarkantha, north Gujarat)*



lādus of magas



*Shrināthji (Shri Krishna)
(Nāthdwārā, Rajasthan)*



*thor (fried wheat rotis soaked and
dried in sugar syrup)*



sweets from Chhappan bhog



Sitāmadhi, Uttar Pradesh



revadi (sesame in sugar syrup)



*Sri Sri Rādhā Govindadev Mandir
(Vrundāvan)*



*browu-coloured pendā and 'charan
tulsi' leaves (with chandan)*

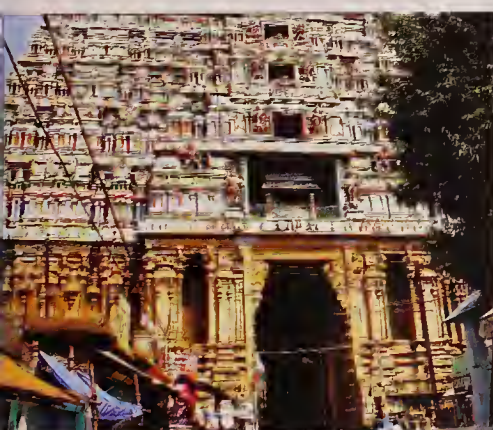
*lādus of bundi, block of dried
chandan, sindur, black powder
of burnt tulsi twigs mixed with
chandan powder*



*Vithobā (Shrikshetra, Pandharpur,
Maharashtra)*



*mamrā (inflated rice), patāsā, pendā,
and sākariā*



Srirangam mandir, Trichi, Kerala



mesub, bundi ladu, vade, chandan



*yogurt pongal, āubli (tamarind)
pongāl, sakkar pongal*



Somnāth Mahādeva, Verāval, Gujarat



lādus of churmu (wheat flour)

Miscellaneous shrines



mamrā (inflated rice), makhaniā, sākar, groundnuts, 2 nādā chhadis



Gangotri – sākariā, makhaniā, dried coconut, sākar, dried raisins



Yammotri – dried coconut, sākariā, and wild tulsi leaves



south Indian temple prasādam



murukku (sweet)



kalikundu (sākar)



adirasam (sweet)



matte (sweet)



Traditional prasādam during utsavs in BAPS Swāminārāyan mandirs



Fuldol – fagwa (dates, chanā, popped jowar & corn)



Rāmanavmi, Swāminārāyan Jayanti, Krishna Janmāshṭami – panchājiri

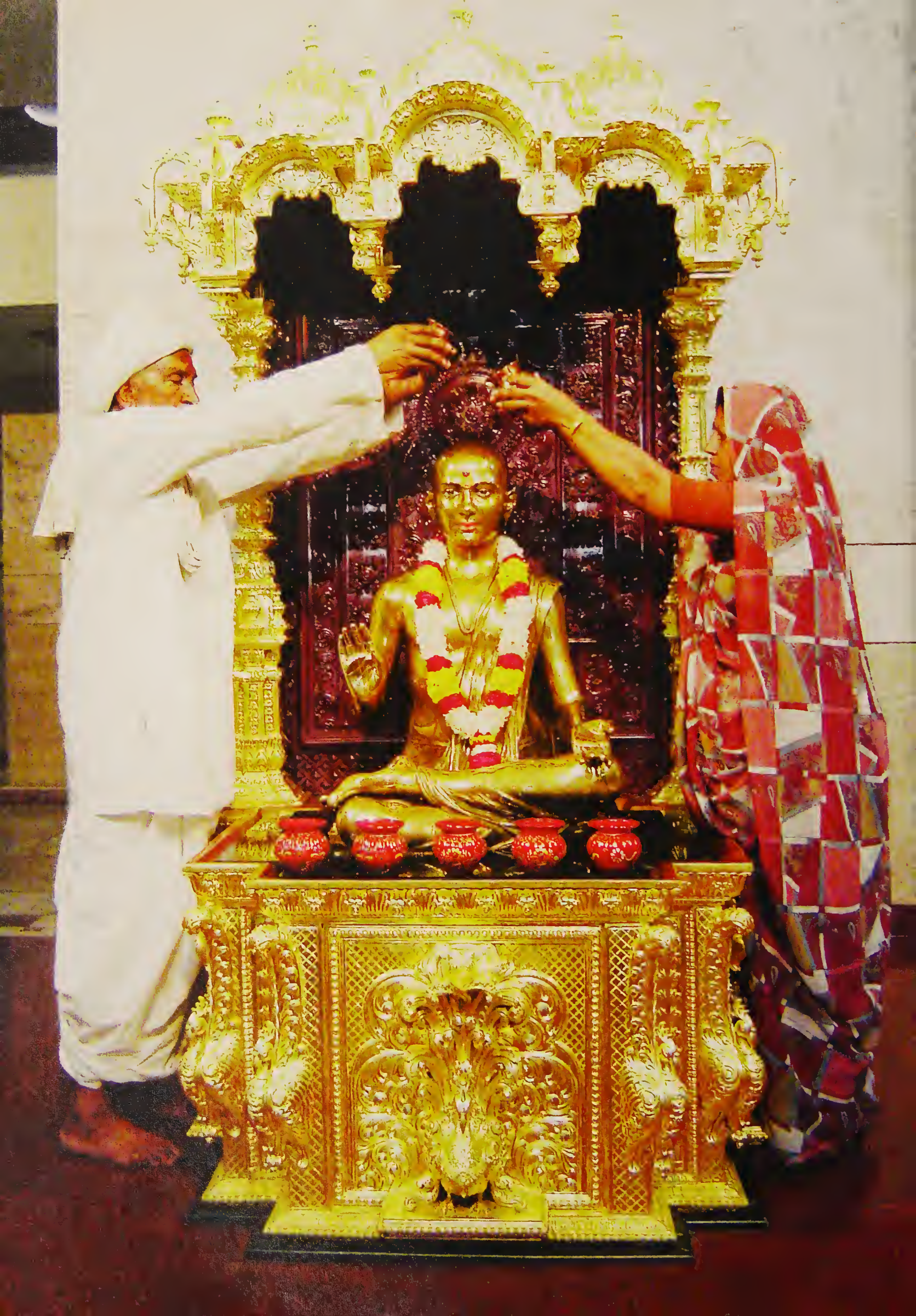


*Annakut prasād
(see previous page)*

*Sharad Punam – dudh paunwā
(parched rice, milk, saffron & elaichi)*



Annakut prasādam in BAPS mandirs: packet of mixed spicy chavānu, bundi lādu, mohanthāl, mesub & motaiyā lādu



8. Abhishek (Bathing murtis)



अभिषेक

In Sanātan Dharma's Vedic bhakti tradition, *Abhishek* is a form of *archanam* in the nine forms of devotion, known as *Navdhā Bhakti* (see Ch.12). It is a ritual in which a liquid, usually milk or water, is poured on *Paramātmā*, *avatār*, *deva*, *guru* and a king when he is coronated. *Mahā abhishek* is a grand *abhishek* performed only on sacred occasions or anniversaries, such as *Mahā Shivrātri*. *Snapan* also means *abhishek*.

Other occasions for *abhishek* of *murtis* include the rituals preceding a *murti*'s consecration – *prāna pratishthā* – in a *mandir* (see Ch.2), as well as on *Pātotsav* (Ch.9). The latter is an *utsav* celebrated on the annual anniversary (*tithi*), when the *murtis* were first consecrated in a *mandir*.

In the Vedic tradition, *abhishek* was performed by dipping *kush* or *darbh* grass in water and then sprinkled on the *deva*'s *murti* while reciting Vedic mantras.

In the ancient *shāstras*, one of the principle forms of performing *pujā* of deities was with 64 items (*dravyas*). The tenth was an important *pujā* ritual known as *Kanak-kalashstitha-sarvatirthābhishekam*. This involved *abhishek* with sanctified water by invoking all *tirths* in the *kalash* (pot).

In Vedic *yagnas*, *abhishek* formed an important part of the whole ritual. In *Rājsuya yagnas*, water from 17 different sources was kept in 17 different vessels made of the *udumbar* tree, for use in *abhishek*.

In the *Aitareya Samhitā* (2-7-15,17) there is a reference to *Rājyābhishek*, an important rite performed during the coronation of a king, in which *abhishek* was performed with seven types of precious gems. The *Vālmiki Rāmāyan* (Yudhkand 131) describes *Shri Rāmachandra Bhagwān*'s grand *rājyābhishek*.

After shaving his head, he was bathed and adorned with rich garments. Then he was paraded in a chariot through the whole of *Ayodhyā*. From the chariot, he was transferred on an elephant. The citizens jubilantly welcomed him by waving flags. *Hanumānji*, *Jāmbuvan* and two other people brought four *kalashs* of sea water. Similarly, *kalashs* of water from

Abhishekam in Guruvāyur, Kerala

After *abhishek* with *gingili* oil, *abhishekam* of *Guruvāyurappan* (*Shri Krishna*) is performed with holy water known as *Vaarunajalam*. This is water in a *shankh* in which the seven river deities; *Gangā*, *Yamunā*, *Godāvari*, *Saraswati*, *Narmadā*, *Sindhu* and *Kāveri*, are invoked with *Brahmakalasa* mantra
(*Vaidyanathan* 2006:58).

In the *Janārdana Swamy* *mandir* in *Varkalā*, *Kerala*, two *abhishekas* are performed daily; one after *Nirmalyam* in the early morning and the second at about 10.00 a.m., known as *Navakaabhisheka*.

In *Pandharpur*, *Maharashtra*, the *ārti* of *Vithobā* (*Shri Krishna*) at 7 a.m., is known as *abhishek ārti*, since *abhishek* is performed prior to it with *panchānurut* and sacred water from the nearby *Chandrabhaga* river.

Kumbha-abhishekam

This term is commonly used in south Indian temples. It means anointing *Paramātmā* in the *mandir* with mantra water from a *kumbha* (pot). This ritual is also performed during the (re)consecration of a *Shivaling* or deity in the sanctum of a *mandir*. This ritual is similar to the *Pātotsav* ritual cited in Ch.9. A *Kumbhabhisheka* is prescribed once in 12 years. However in practice it may occur after 60 years
(*Temple India* p.17).

opp. page: *Bhagwān Swāminārāyan* in the *Abhishek mandapam*, *BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir*, *Amdavad*

500 sacred rivers were brought. The first person to perform Shri Rāma's *abhishek* with fragrant water, was the royal pundit – Vasishtha rishi, followed by other rishis. Then followed his ministers, soldiers, merchants and other citizens.

During Yudhisthira's coronation, the Mahābhārat cites in the Shānti and Adi Parvas, a long list of materials used for his *rājyābhishek*. During the Mahābhārat's period, in addition to the *rājyābhishek* rite, another form of *abhishek* was performed, when stalwart warriors were appointed strategic posts. For example Bhima as Yuvarāj (Shānti Parva 41), Bhishma as commander (Udyog Parva 155, 26-32) and Drona (Drona Parva 5, 39-43).

On 16th November 1801 CE, (Kārtik *sud* 11, Ashadhi Samvat 1858), guru Rāmānand Swami performed *abhishek* of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan on appointing Him as Head of the Sampradāy, in the town of Jetpur in Saurashtra. This rite is known as *Pattābhishek*.

In the mandirs of south India, a Vaishnava bhakti tradition stipulated in the Panchrātra Āgams continues in its pristine glory, in which deities are offered *abhishek* everyday (*nitya abhishek*).

In northern India, a few days prior to Shrāvan, lakhs of devotees leave home to walk hundreds of kilometres, to fill pots of sacred water from the Gangā at Gaumukh, Rishikesh and Haridwār. Known as *Kāvadis*, they wear saffron shirts, shorts and head scarves. Each *Kāvadi* carries two pots or plastic cans, one tied at each end of a decorated pole, hung on the shoulder. Along the way, during rest periods, the pole is hung high to prevent the containers touching the ground. On returning home, they use this water for *abhishek* on their tutelary deities.

Abhishek is usually performed by officiating pundits, pujāris or sadhus. In some of the 12 self-formed Jyotirlings, and many smaller shrines of Mahādevaji in towns and villages, householders are allowed to perform *abhishek* with milk on the Shivaling.

In the BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir in London, milk *abhishek* is held on a grand scale for devotees on Mahā Shivrātri. In the year the photo on the right was taken, a large conch shell was placed outside Shri Umā-Mahesh's sanctum.



kāvadi at Haridwār with Gangā water



abhishek at Ghrushneshwar Jyotirling, nr. Ellora, Maharashtra

Devotees poured milk in this *shankh*. A channel allowed the milk to flow onto the sanctum's Shivaling. Thus devotees experienced total fulfillment in having performed milk *abhishek* on the Shivaling. In the US, devotees similarly perform *abhishek* on Mahā Shivrātri in BAPS's new Vedic *shikharbaddh* mandirs in Houston and Chicago.

Neelkanth Varni Abhishek

Until recently, in the BAPS Swāminārāyan mandirs in India, *gruhasth* devotees could perform *abhishek* of the small, *chal* – mobile – *murti* of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, known as Harikrishna Mahārāj, only once a year on the day of *Pātotsav*. However on 9th December 2001, HDH Shri Pramukh Swami Mahārāj first consecrated the metallic *murti* of Neelkanth Varni in the *Rangmandapam* of the new Vedic *shikharbaddh* mandir in Bharuch, south Gujarat. This was specially so that devotees could offer *abhishek* every day to fulfill a *maanta* – wish (see Ch.17). Usually, devotees pledge to perform *abhishek* after a certain wish or desire is fulfilled. The unexpected fulfillment of such wishes and the tremendous spiritual solace experienced by devotees, has gained the *abhishek* ritual an important place in the hearts of all BAPS followers worldwide. Since Bharuch, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj has consecrated similar *murtis* of Neelkanth Varni in Tithal, Surat, London, Houston, Chicago, Swāminārāyan Akshardhām (New Delhi), Atladrā (Vadodara), Junāgad and Bochāsan.



Mahā Shivrātri abhishek,
BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir,
London



panchāmrit abhishek of
Harikrishna Mahārāj by devotees
of BAPS on Pātotsav



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj performing
abhishek of the first murti of
Neelkanth Varni , Shri Swāminārāyan
Mandir, Bharuch, Gujarat

schoolchildren performing abhishek
of Neelkanth Varni in Swāminārāyan
Akshardhām, New Delhi

It is also becoming vogue for newly-wed couples to visit the nearest mandir with Neelkanth Varni, to perform *abhishek* together, as a crowning finale of *vivāh samskāra* rites. The reasons are three-fold:

- (1) to express gratitude to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and His spiritual successors, all *devas* and guru Shri Pramukh Swami Mahārāj for a successful *vivāh samskāra* ritual.
- (2) to pray for healthy offspring, eternal happiness and *saubhāgya*.
- (3) to attain, through *vivāh*, the four endeavours, of dharma, *artha*, *kāma* and moksha.

On 3rd July 2006, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj consecrated a metallic *murti* of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan in a seated posture, for *abhishek* in the *Rangmandapam* of the BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan mandir in Amdavad. This was in commemoration of the fact that He often passed and rested on the spot where the present mandir is located in Shahibaug, on numerous occasions, on His way from inside the walled city to bathe in the river Sābarmati, in the early 19th century.

The above *abhishek* rituals are conducted by pujāris, who perform a short *sankalp* rite by chanting the appropriate Vedic mantras. Devotees participate by holding water in their palms and mentally pledge their vows or wishes. They then perform *abhishek* by pouring sanctified water from a small copper pot (*kalash*) over the *murti*.

Abhishek of Neelkanth Varni has also become a favourite for people from other sampradayas visiting Swāminārāyan Akshardhām, New Delhi and in the BAPS mandirs abroad. There are two reasons for *abhishek's* immense popularity. Firstly, it is an innovative worship ritual in which lay *grahasths* can get such close proximity to a *murti*. Secondly, Bhagwān Neelkanth Varni's divinity offers immense spiritual solace to everybody.

By introducing *abhishek* of Neelkanth Varni and Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj has established a historical and innovative concept of worship to *murtis* in mandirs, in the Sanātan Dharma. It is innovative in that the whole family can participate, as well as members of any other sampradāya, including non-Hindus.



*A non-Hindu family performing
abhishek, Shri Swāminārāyan
Mandir, Chicago*

Thus the *abhishek* ritual is meant for all those who have faith in Paramātmā.

Abhishek during murti prāna pratishthā

As part of the inauguration rituals of Swāminārāyan Akshardhām in New Delhi on 17/7/2005, (Āshādh sud 10), when Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's gold-leafed *murti* was consecrated on the *pithikā* (pedestal) in the central monument, its *pradhānsnapanam abhishek* was performed, with 12 pots of water of various herbs as enjoined by the Pārmeshwar Samhitā (14/34-78) of the Panchrātra shāstras. This sacred water was also used to perform *abhishek* of Akshardhām's *shikhars*.

From 4th to 6th November 2005, the *murti pratishthā* ritual was performed. During this, an *abhishek* named *Aparabhede trutyaparyāyeuttamottamasnapanam* was performed of the *murti*, with 49 pots containing water of herbs, plants and gems, as specified in the Pārmeshwar Samhitā (14/236-258).

Anantakalashasnapanam in Bochāsan

On 27th April, 2007, during the 100th *pātotsav* of the BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā's first mandir, in Bochāsan, a *Mahā abhishek* named *Anantakalashasnapanam* was performed of Akshar and Purushottam, with 1001 *kalashes* of water sanctified by gems, fruits, medicinal herbs, grains, pulses, sprouted pulses, buds of herbs, wild herbs, *panchgavya*, *panchāmrut*, flower juice, sugarcane juice, jaggery water, honey, coconut water, leaves, oil seeds, roots, spices, metals (gold, silver, copper, lead, *kānsu*), water and soil from India's holy rivers, oceans, lakes, wells, rainwater, snowwater from mountains and *tirths*, enjoined in the Pārmeshwar Samhitā (4/343-495) and Ishvara Samhitā (15/234-393).



Abhishek in the Tirumālā

Devasthanam, Tirupati, south India.

Abhishek, known as *Thirumanjanam*, is performed every Friday at 3.30 am. of Bhagwān Venkateshwar Bālāji. Purush Sukta of the Rig Veda is chanted during *abhishek*. On Wednesday, the Bhoga Srinivasa is bathed with a 1008 silver kalashes at 5.30 am. in the Tirumamani mantapam, a ritual known as *Sahasra Kalas Abhishekam*.

(Sitapati 1998:156-7)

Abhishek in Guruvāyūr, Kerala.

'Mandalam' – a period of 41 days from the first of the solar month of *Vrishchikam* (mid-November) is regarded highly auspicious. On the final day of *Mandalam*, the Zamorin Rajah performs *Kalabhabhishekam*, a ritual performed only once a year.

After *abhishek* with *gingili* oil, *abhishekam* of the deity is performed with holy water known as *Vaarunajalam*. This is water in a shankh in which the seven river deities; *Gangā*, *Yamunā*, *Godāvari*, *Saraswati*, *Narmadā*, *Sindhu* and *Kāveri*, are invoked with *Brahmakalasa* mantra.

(Vaidyanathan 2006:58)



one of the 1001 kalashes carried by the women's wing during the kalash shobha yātrā in Bochāsan (26th April, 2007)

Anantakalashasnanam in Bochāsan, 26-27 April 2007



yagna performed prior to the kalash sthāpan ritual on 26th April, 2007

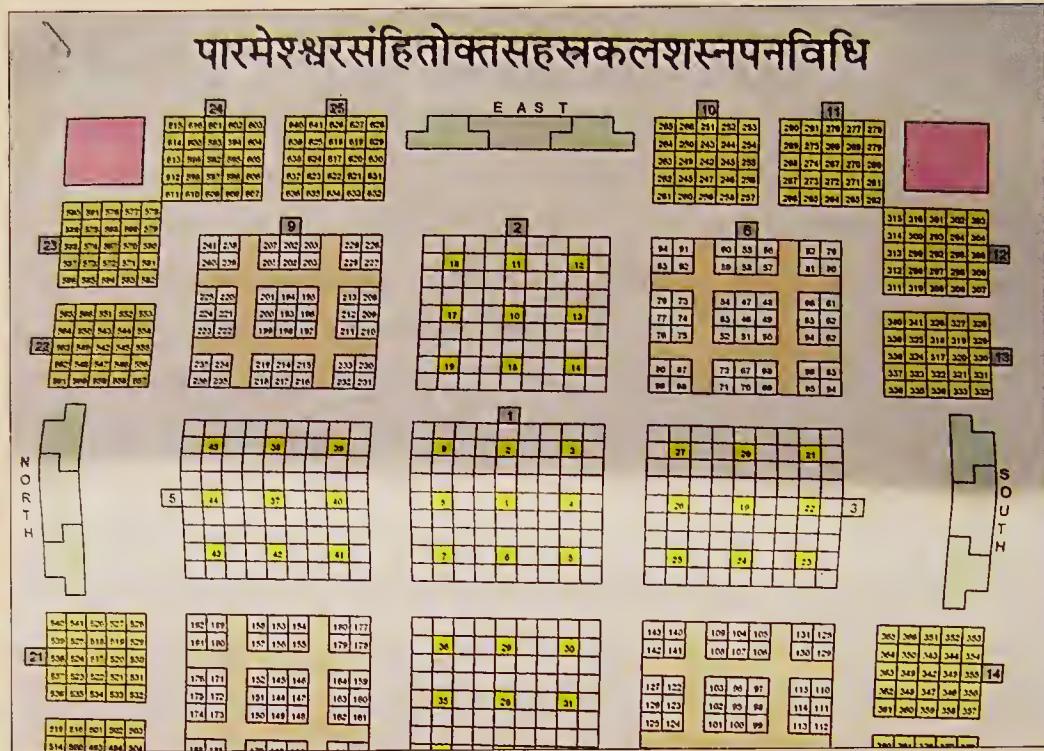
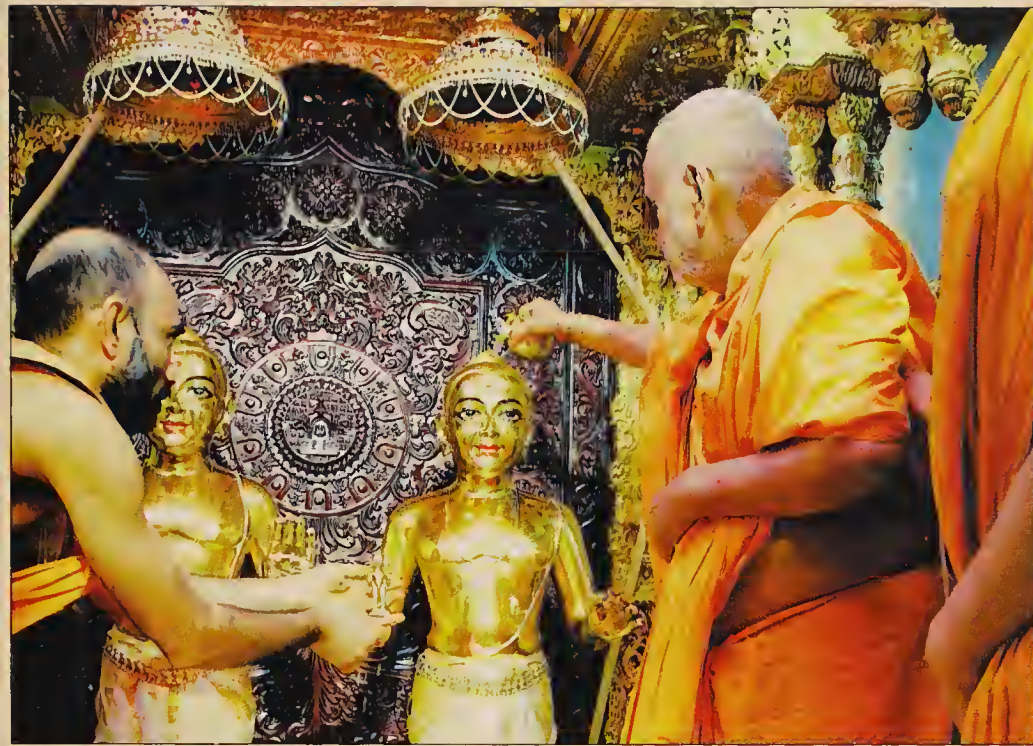


diagram of the arrangement of the 1001 kalashes

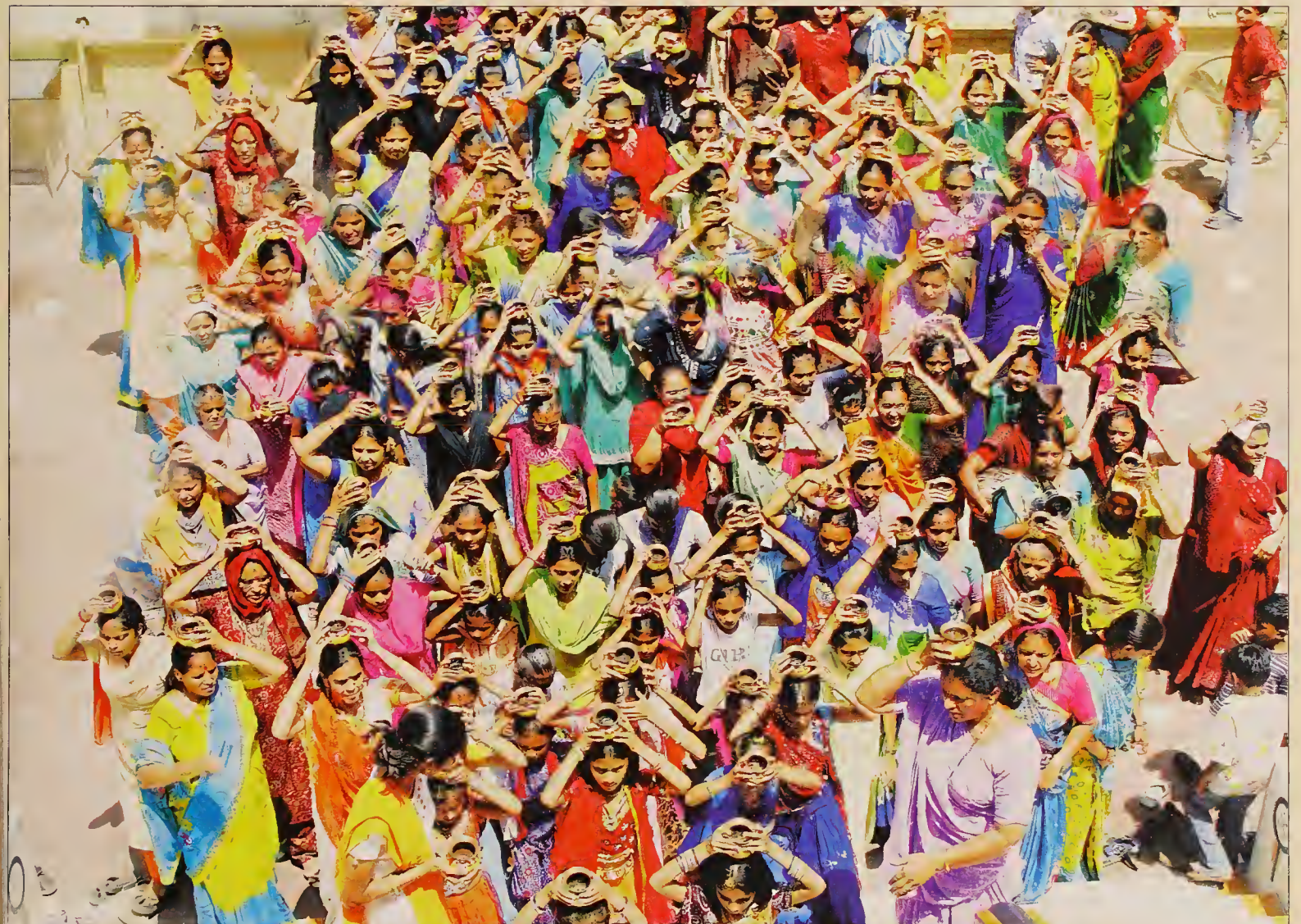


1001 kalashes



*one of the four kalashs used by
Pramukh Swami Mahārāj to perform
Mahā abhishek*

*Pramukh Swami Mahārāj performing Mahā abhishek of
Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami in the central shrine*



kalash shobha yātrā entering the Bochāsān mandir (2.00 pm. 26th April, 2007)



9. Pātotsav

(Murti consecration anniversary utsav)

Mandirs and *murti puja* form a fundamental part of Sanātan Dharma. A traditional sacred ritual prevails which celebrates the anniversaries of *murti* consecration (*prāna pratishthā*) of mandirs. Known as *Pātotsav*, the word is a compound of *pāt* and *utsav* – festival. *Pāt* is derived from *patti*, a strip of garment tied on the head of a *murti*. From this evolved *pāt*.

Sentiments

It is generally believed, albeit mistakenly, that *Pātotsav* is a re-consecration *utsav*, re-invoking Paramātmā. This stems from the belief that during the whole year, the *murtis* lose some divinity from two possible factors: (1) any laxity by the *pujāri* in offering devotional worship. (2) the sheer volume of burden heaped at the lotus-feet of the *murtis* by devotees overwhelmed by *māyā*. However, during the Dādar (Mumbai) mandir's *Pātotsav* in 1987, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj clarified that Paramātmā's divinity never dissipates. It is only our *bhāva* – devotional love, that ebbs. By celebrating *Pātotsav*, our inner sentiments for Paramātmā and guru are rekindled and reinvigorated. Hence *Pātotsav* is a ritual which celebrates the anniversary of the *tithi* when the *murtis* were first consecrated.

Ritual

In the BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandirs, sadhus perform a grand *abhishek* of the *murtis* after the *mangalā ārti* in the morning. *Abhishek* involves pouring *panchāmrut* on the *murtis*. This ritual is performed in a prescribed sequence by chanting specific Vedic mantras, including the Purush Sukta of the Rig Veda. The sanctified *panchāmrut*, known as *charanāmrut* is collected and later availed of by devotees. After *abhishek*, the *murtis* are bathed with pure water (*shuddhodak snān*) and adorned with *Shanagār* – garments, ornaments and flower garlands. A rich *annakut* of sweets and savoury dishes is offered. This is followed by *ārti*. The *annakut prasād* and *charanāmrut* are then distributed.



पाटोत्सव



pujā dravyas for pātotsav

After abhishek, a grand mahāpujā is held in the mandir's sabhā mandap, in which devotees participate with immense mahimā, since Pātotsav occurs only once a year.



devotees performing abhishek with panchamrut of the chal Deities during Pātotsav (Amdavad)

opp. page: Pramukh Swami Mahārāj performing abhishek of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, during a pātotsav in the BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan mandir, Amdavad.





10. Satsang sabhā

(Public spiritual gathering)

सत्संग

- Glory of satsang
- Importance of the satsang sabhā.
- Contribution of the satsang sabhā to society.
- Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and Gunātī successors on the satsang sabhā.

Sat means truth, *sang* denotes association. *Satsang* denotes association with truth in three forms: Paramātmā, the true theistic shāstras and the Satpurush – the Sadhu who has realised Paramātmā.

Glory of satsang

It was by such satsang with a sadhu that Alexander the Great realised the folly of his warring expeditions to usurp foreign land, which induced him to turn back. It was satsang by wandering sadhus that provided fortitude to the people of *Bhāratvarsh* and kept them united for over a millennium during turbulence by foreign aggression. It was satsang with his guru, Swami Rāmadās, that guided Shivāji about his duty to protect dharma.

Only by *satsang* can one gain knowledge about Paramātmā. And the Vedas proclaim:

|| hrute jnānānna muktihi ||

– without knowledge of Paramātmā there can be no moksha.

The Atharva Veda (10/8/16) advises: ‘O sons of the nation! Man is uplifted only by the company of scholars, the wise and men of character. Satsang is the gym for spiritual exercise.’

In the Bruhadāranyaka Upanishad, Yājñavalkya rishi extolled the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman in the famous debate held by King Janak. Despite being a king, Ambrish Rājā associated with rishis. Arjuna’s satsang with Shri Krishna on the battlefield, snapped him out of depression and clarified doubts about his duty to protect dharma. King Parikshit heard the Bhāgvat *kathā* from Shukdevaji. The former’s son, King Janmejaya heard the Mahābhārat *kathā* from Vaishampāyan rishi.

opp. page: Sunday satsang gathering

In ancient Bhārat, people generally had an immense predilection for satsang; reading, reciting and listening to *kathā* by sadhus, listening to events, stories, shloks and *stotras* from the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhāgvatam, Rāmāyan and even memorising the Gitā.

Of all the endeavours to please Paramātmā, Shri Krishna cites the glory of *satsang*:

*Satsangādeva matprāptir bhaved
bhuvi mumukshutam*
– aspirants on earth attain me only
through satsang
(Bhagwān Vishnu to Nārādji, in
Skand Purāna, Vāsudeva Mahātmya
18/65).

*Nā rodhayati mām yogo na sāmkhya dharma eva cha,
Na swādhyāyastapasyāgo neshtāpurtam na dakshinā,
Vratāni yagnashchhāndāmsi tirthāni niyamā yamāhā,
Yathāvarmdhe satsangaha sarvasangapaho hi mām.*

– Bhāgvatam 11.12.1,2

– Ashtāng Yog, Sāmkhya (system of philosophy), Vedic study, austerities, renunciation, offerings in the sacred fire, beneficial deeds for society such as, digging wells and planting trees, donation, fasting, chanting mantras, pilgrimage and observing major and minor spiritual injunctions, do not please me, as does *satsang*.

In the Shikshāpatri (114), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan emphatically declares that even erudite scholars of shāstras degrade without *satsang* and bhakti. The reason for this is that they have no association with Paramātmā or guidance from the Satpurush.

Tulsidās also glorifies satsang:

*Binu satsang na Harikathā, tehi binu moha na bhāg,
moha gaye binu Rāma pada, hoi na dradh anurāg*

– Rāmacharitmānas (7/84)

– without satsang and Bhagwān’s *kathā*, delusion (of māyā) is not removed. If delusion is not removed, one does not develop intense love for Rāma.

Importance of the satsang sabhā

Satsang also denotes public bhakti in which devotees offer worship, celebrate festivals and participate in spiritual activities such as *kathā*, singing bhajans, reciting mantras and shāstras, in large numbers rather than individually.

The importance of the *satsang sabhā* is that this necessarily involves interaction with other devotees and working together in harmony with only one aim, to please the Satpurush. During this process, Paramātmā graces them

Sabhā is a gathering of people, an assembly. In the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, *sabhā* also denotes a spiritual gathering. A *satsang sabhā* is a public gathering of devotees to hold a spiritual discourse (*kathā*).



through the Satpurush, by making them aware of their latent base instincts (*swabhāvas*), also known as *prakruti* and *dosh*. These are impressions of past karmas fused in the causal body (*kāran sharir*), such as: envy, anger, jealousy, hate, pride, lust, greed and others. This ‘enlightening’ of one’s *dosh* is echoed by Tulsidās:

Jab Hari krupā howat hai, tab sujat apnā dosh

– only by Hari’s grace does one become aware of one’s *dosh*.

This is vitally important for an aspirant. For only when he becomes aware of these *doshas*, does he strive to eradicate them. This may also be regarded as a form of *sādhana*. However, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan points out that these *doshas* can never be fully eradicated solely by one’s efforts. The aspirant’s sincere efforts invite the Satpurush’s grace, who then eradicates them completely (Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā II-7).

For this reason, Yogiji Mahārāj founded the weekly *satsang sabhā*. In mundane life, people keep Sunday a free day, to recover from the week’s tension and turmoil. However in reality, nothing of the sort materialises. People tend to sleep late on Saturdays and wake up late on Sundays, more exhausted. The rest of the day is then spent in eating, drinking and watching TV, all of which are mentally and physically draining. True *shānti* results only from *kathā*. This strikes the discord at the roots.

Tulsidās says:

*Rāma kathā sundar-kar tārī,
samshaya bihaga udāvana hārī*

– just as birds fly away by clapping under a tree, doubts in the mind dissolve by Bhagwān’s *kathā*.

Satsang sabhā adds pages of dharma (righteousness), *jnān* (knowledge), *vairāgya* (detachment) and *bhakti* (devotion) to the annals of life.

The *satsang sabhā* is a treasure trove of redemptive (*kalyāṅkāri*) virtues. It is a bond linking awareness, introspection and attachment to Paramātmā. As well as being a spiritual congregation for *bhaktas*, the *satsang sabhā* simultaneously functions as a social gathering. This provides social warmth to each individual. In today’s society of stressed individuals, social support of this kind is absolutely

Sabha decorum:

In a sabhā, one should not, without covering one’s mouth, laugh loudly, cough, sneeze or burp.

(Agni Purāna 105/25,
Vishnudharmottara Purāna
2/89/49).

In his book, Mind as Healer, Mind as Slayer, Kenneth R. Pelletier, a former scientist at the Stanford Centre for Research in Disease Prevention, says,

“Evidence is accumulating that positive social support is necessary for a person’s heart. Supportive interactions among people and cultures may affect our ability to resist illness. A sense of belonging and affiliation appears to be a basic human need. There is now abundant evidence to show that social support may be one of the critical elements distinguishing those who remain healthy from those who do not” (1992: xlviii).

necessary for the health and stability of the individual and the community.

Contribution of the satsang sabhā to society

Satsang sabhā creates strong families wedded to values. It creates children and youth of character, who respect elders and who have a strong, selfless spirit of serving society (*sevā*) with zest. Satsang contributes by instilling and fostering virtues (*sadgunas*) missing in today's society, such as truth, non-violence, celibacy, tolerance, morality, compassion, love, brotherhood and faith in Bhagwān.

Through the *satsang sabhā*, the following Vedic sentiments become a reality:

|| *'Sangachhadvam samvadadvam...'* ||

– Rig Veda 10/191/2

– let us think alike, speak alike, let our knowledge be alike and let us do our work harmoniously, just as divine ones did in the past.

|| *'Ishāvāsyamidam sarvam ...'* ||

– Isha Upanishad 1

Paramātmā is present everywhere in this universe,

|| *'Sarvetra sukhinaha santu ...'* ||

– let everyone everywhere (on earth) be happy.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and the Gunātī successors on satsang Bhagwān Swāminārāyan

In Vachanāmṛt Gadhadā II-54, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan concurs with Shri Krishna Bhagwān on the greatness and glory of satsang, by citing the Shrimad Bhāgavatam (11.12.1,2):

‘I am not pleased by: Ashtāṅg Yog, Sāmkhya, Vedic study, austerities, renunciation, offerings in yagna, beneficial deeds for society such as digging wells and planting trees, donation, fasting, chanting mantras, pilgrimage and observing major and minor spiritual injunctions, as I am by Satsang.’

‘If one practices satsang with absolute sincerity, then no *doshas* will remain in one's heart, and one will become *brahmarup* in this very lifetime.’

(Vachanāmṛt Sārangpur 9)

‘Even erudite scholars of the shāstras degrade without bhakti and satsang.’

(Shikshāpatri 114)



‘If one does satsang for a 100 years, and yet if one misses it for even one day, then māyā’s eternal darkness (*avidya*) will affect him detrimentally. Therefore one should do satsang daily.’

(Haricharitrāmṛut Sāgar 17/11/19-38)

Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami

‘When the *antahkaran* (heart) becomes pure, the jiva attains happiness. This occurs by satsang.’

(Swāmini Vāto 1/66).

‘Satsang is the only way by which a *jiva* attains (*ātmic*) strength.’

(Swāmini Vāto 2/18).

Bhagatji Mahārāj

Without attaching one’s *ātmā* to the Satpurush, one cannot gain happiness, peace or virtues.

(Dave 2003:131).

Shāstriji Mahārāj

(1) When one associates with the Satpurush, then one gains virtues (Dave 1995 II:293).

(2) Only in a human birth, does one acquire auspicious samskāras through association and sevā of the Satpurush. Therefore by knowing such a true Satpurush, one should perform his sevā mentally, physically, verbally and therein realise Ekāntik Dharma.

Only this is the true dutiful action of a human birth (Dave 1995 I:427, 426).

(3) The greatest sevā is to realise the knowledge of *ātmā* and Paramātmā, and inspire countless others to realise it. Knowledge (*jnān*) and detachment (*vairāgya*) are a bridge to remove any obstacle between Bhagwān and bhakta. This is attained by satsang (Dave 1995 II:34).

Yogiji Mahārāj

‘One should forego a profit of even Rs. 25,000 and attend the Sunday satsang sabhā. Just as one opens a shop half an hour early to do business, similarly if one realises the importance of the sabhā, then one will surely attend on time.’

Pramukh Swami Mahārāj

‘By attending the Sunday satsang sabhā, one derives strength to eradicate one’s foibles and baser instincts which are impediments on the path of moksha.’





11. Pārāyan (Extended spiritual discourse)

- Origin
- Pārāyan traditions
- Pārāyans in northern India
- Pārāyan in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

पारायण

Origin

The concept of *pārāyan* or an extended *kathā* originates in the Shrimad Bhāgavatam. The noble hearted Gokarna wished to perform some religious ritual to redeem his dead step-brother, Dhundhukāri's *jivātmā*. The latter had been steeped in all forms of *pāp karmas* during his life. Therefore he became a ghost. Gokarna performed Dhundhukāri's *shrāddh* at Gayā, yet this did not redeem him. Even those learned in the *shāstras* could not find recourse to redeem Dhundhukāri. Then Suryadeva advised Gokarna to hold the Bhāgvat *kathā* for seven days (Bhāgavata Mahātmya 5/41).

Dhundhukāri listened to the Bhāgvat *kathā* by residing in a bamboo cane with seven joints. After each day's *kathā*, one joint of the bamboo cane would crack apart. Gokarna realised that this was the beginning of Dhundhukāri's liberation. At the end of the *kathā* on the seventh day, the seventh joint cracked. Dhundhukāri attained moksha and transcended to Shri Krishna's abode (Bhāgavata Mahātmya 5/47-53).

Since then, *pārāyan* of the Bhāgavatam has greater significance for people who wish to redeem their departed relatives and themselves.

Pārāyan traditions

There is a lofty tradition in Sanātana Dharma of holding a *kathā* after a person's demise. Instead of mourning for the deceased, relatives arrange a recitation of *shāstras* which glorify Bhagwān's *lilā charitras*. This helps alleviate pain from the loss of the departed. It also positively infuses spiritual fortitude in the relatives. People may also arrange a *kathā* for any one of the following: to earn Paramātmā's grace, for the overall well being of one's family and relatives and for the success of a forthcoming occasion or project.

A *pārāyan* is an extended *kathā*. It may be held for one day, or more, upto ten days. The *pārāyan* which is held after

"One should listen to and study shāstras glorifying Paramātmā and his lilā repeatedly again and again."

– Nārada Panchrātra, Sankarshan Samhitā, Acharatre (1/77)

Pārāyan of the Shrimad Bhāgavatam is also known as Bhāgvatāsaptāh.



Shrimad Bhāgavatam manuscript

opp. page: pārāyan of the Shrimad Bhāgavatam in the BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Amdavad, 25 December, 2006

Close relatives may also observe a diet of *farār* during the *pārāyan*'s duration, as a form of self-abnegation and to save time from catering, which can be spent in *Hari smaran* – devotion. *Farārī* foods (see p.431) are *sāttvic*, help increase concentration and decrease bouts of dozing, which is a common occurrence in *kathā*!

Pārāyans in northern India:

Shrimad Bhāgvat Jnānyagya, Shrimad Bhāgvat Saptāh, Rāmacharitmānas Navāhan pārāyan, Shri Rāma kathā, Shrimad Bhagvad Gitā Jnānsatra, Vishāl satsang, Upanishat Vyākhyān mālā.

antyeshti of an individual is usually of ten days. It remains flexible in different groups and sections of society. Some usually just hold recitation of one of the following: *Shrimad Bhāgvatam* the *Gitā*, *Rāmāyan*, the *Garud Purāna*, *Satyanārāyan kathā* or *Hanumān Chālisā*. Others chant *Rāma dhun* for a certian number of hours per day, for a week or so. This is a *pārāyan* in the form of *dhun*.

In northern India, especially Uttar Pradesh, *pārāyan* of *Tulsidās's Rāmacharitmānas*, known as *Shri Rāma kathā*, is held during the *Navrātri* of the *Chaitra* month, prior to *Rāmanavmi*. The *Rāmalilā* is enacted by children during *Navrātri* of *Aso* month, prior to *Dasherā*. On *Dasherā* the *Rāvandahan* is held on a grand scale.

Navāhan pārāyan of Rāmacharitmānas in northern India during Navrātri in Āso



men carrying the *shāstra* to the *pārāyan* hall



women with *kalashs* in the *shobhā yātrā*



each family recites the *shāstra* from 5.00 am. to 8.30 am. for 9 days



purnāhuti yagya by 108 families (in 108 *kundis*), on completion of the *pārāyan*



Rāmalilā enacted by schoolchildren during *Navrātri* in *Āso*

In Guruvāyur, Kerala there is a unique variation of *pārāyan*, known as *Krishnanattam*. This is an eight-day dance-drama of Shri Krishna's *lilā*. It was written in the form of a dance-drama by Prince Manaveda of Calicut, a scholar and poet, in 1654, in the wake of the 12th century Bengali poet-mystic Jayadeva's *Geet Govinda*. The *Krishnanattam* is enacted by a special troupe of actors, under the auspices of the Guruvāyur Devaswom. It is traditionally staged at night, on the northern side of the temple complex, after the mandir closes. It continues through the night, until the opening of the *Srikoil (garbha gruha)* at 3 am.

Pārāyan in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

In the *Shikshāpatrī*, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan enjoins followers to listen to *kathā* as a special and extra vow, during the holy month of Shrāvan:

*Ekasmin shrāvane māsi sa twashaktaistu mānavaihi
Vishnoho kathāyāhā shravanam vāchanam gunakirtanam...*

— *Shikshāpatrī* 76

Traditionally, from the time of Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami, this *kathā* was of the Harililāmrutam. This poetic text glorifies Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's *lilā charitras*. It was originally composed in two volumes in the Devnagri script by Kavishwar Dalpatrām, the renowned poet of mid-19th century Gujarat, under the auspices of Āchārya Shri Vihārīlālji Mahārāj of Vartāl. In 1999 BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā rendered it in Gujarati script.

During Shrāvan, BAPS followers worldwide, visit their nearest mandir or satsang centre every evening, to listen to sadhus or *grahasths* recite the Harililāmrutam's ineffably sweet and melodious verses. Each *kathā* lasts for about 1.5 hours. Before the *kathā* commences, the *yajmāns* (sponsors) perform *pujan* of the text, as well as of the *kathā-kar* (orator).

This is followed by *ārti*. After the *kathā*, the Swāminārāyan *dhun* is sung. *Naivedya* (food) is then offered to Bhagwān. This *prasād* is then distributed to the listeners. Shrāvan being the holy month of observing fasts, many usually observe *ektānā*. Hence the *yajmān* of the *pārāyan* usually arranges *farāri prasād* of: fruit, *chiki* of *til* or groundnuts, *coprāpāk* (coconut sweet), *shiro* of *morio* or *rājagro* or a dairy sweet such as *pendā*.



performing *Krishnanattam*
in Guruvāyur, Kerala



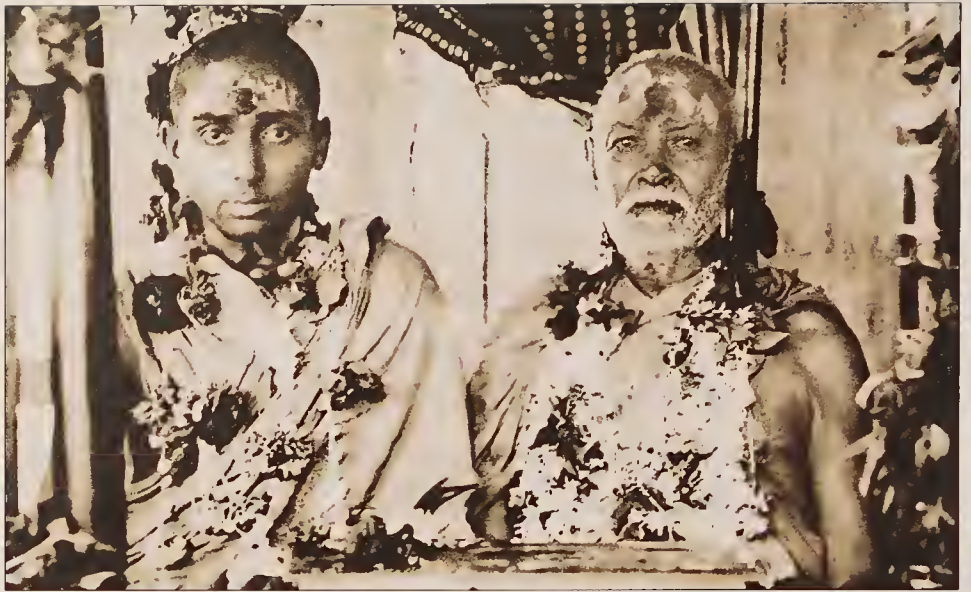
Guruvāyur temple, Kerala



Shri Harililāmrutam



balak during a discourse during a children's p̄rāyan in Kolkata



Shāstriji Mahārāj and the young Shāstri Nārāyanswarupdās (Pramukh Swami Mahārāj) during a p̄rāyan of the Bhaktachintāmani

'As a boy, Dungar bhakta listened to the Mahābhārat kathā by a Mānabhatt using a copper pot, who extolled its p̄rāyan in the village chowk. Half way through, he suffered an illness and died. The kathā remained unfinished. Aware of Dungar bhakta's sharp memory, the villagefolk requested him to finish it. In the same style and entertaining manner, Dungar bhakta finished the Mahābhārat p̄rāyan in one month, which amazed the villagers.'

– Yogiji Mahārāj
(Ishwarcharandas 1989 I:26).

'Shastrji Mahārāj was fond of extolling p̄rāyan on the Harililākalpataru and he had done such a p̄rāyan in Junāgadh.'

– Yogiji Mahārāj
(Ishwarcharandas 1989 III:117).

During Shāstriji Mahārāj's time, he advocated p̄rāyan of the Bhaktachintāmani, for devotees who wished to be relieved from domestic discord, illness or poverty. Yogiji Mahārāj and HDH Pramukh Swami Mahārāj too, continued this tradition.

P̄rāyan of the Shrimad Bhāgavatam is also occasionally sponsored by devotees, in a shikharbaddh mandir. During this kathā, the episodes of Shri Krishna's birth and Tulsi vivāh are actually enacted on stage with great pomp (see photos).

P̄rāyan then is a unique kathā ritual that harmonises people externally and internally. For several hours everyday, it brings together devotees or relatives of a large family, creating harmony and uniting them. Listening and reminiscing *lilā charitras* of Paramātmā, His Satpurush and exalted devotees, also infuses spiritual fortitude and *shānti*. Simultaneously, it lessens or even alleviates the pain and grief of an individual's loss, by instilling an understanding of the miserable, perishable and ephemeral nature of the human body. Moreover, *kathā* provides knowledge of the immortal, *chaitanya* and *sat-chid-ānand* nature of the *ātmā*. Hence individuals can cope with post-death stress through p̄rāyan, a ritual unique to Sanātan Dharma.

Shrimad Bhāgvat pārāyan in the BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya



*yajmān performing puja & ārti of Bhagwān & the
Shrimad Bhāgvatam prior to the pārāyan kathā.
(BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Amdavad, 1998).*



celebrating Shri Krishna's incarnation during Bhāgvat pārāyan



*celebrating Tulsi vivāh during
Bhāgvat pārāyan*

Part 2 – Bhakti Rituals

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Introduction

This section begins with a discussion of the nine forms of bhakti, known as Navdhā Bhakti. It provides the lay reader a proper perspective about how bhakti – devotion – is offered to Bhagwān in Sanātan Dharma's various traditions and sampradāyas.

The Mahā Kumbha Melā occurs every 12 years and the Ardha Kumbha every six years. However since the event is more a sacred bhakti ritual of bathing, with its origin in the shāstras, it has been included in this section, even though only a limited percentage of Hindus are able to participate in an event which occurs infrequently and by its very nature, has to be celebrated at one of the four sacred spots.

Another exception is the *Grahan* – eclipse. Although this cosmic phenomenon occurs twice a year, it is peculiarly considered both a ritual as well as an *utsav*. It is a ritual which is to be 'celebrated' by ceasing all mundane activities and spending the actual period of the eclipse in offering bhakti to Paramātmā in the form of reciting mantras, *nām japa* or bhajans. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan has also enjoined its observance in the same manner in the Shikshāpatri (86). Such observance can be regarded as an *utsav*, since it provides a unique opportunity to devotionally sing bhajans and extol Bhagwān's glory during the eclipse.



12. Navdhā Bhakti

(Nine forms of devotion)

- Shravanam
- Kirtanam
- Smaranam
- Pādsevanam
- Archanam
- Vandanam
- Dāsyam
- Sakhyam
- Ātmanivedanam
- Four other important forms of bhakti
- Navdhā bhakti and instant spiritual strength

The shāstras cite many forms of Yog such as: Rāj, Hath, Japa, Kriyā, Laya, Mantra, Tantra, Jnān, Karma and Bhakti.

Of these, Bhagwān Kapildeva reveals to his mother Devahuti, “For yogis, there is no other path by which Bhagwān is attained than the path of bhakti¹ for ShriHari, which is redemptive.

– Bhāgvatam 3/25/19

To Uddhavji, his foremost *bhakta*², Shri Krishna Bhagwān too reveals, “O Uddhav! What Yog, knowledge, dharma, study of shāstras, austerities and renunciation cannot attain, the highest bhakti offered towards me, can attain me.”

– Bhāgvatam 11/14/20

Ādi Shankarāchārya, the proponent of Advait Vedānt, also considered bhakti to be the supreme path of sādhanā: *bhaktireva gariyasi*. Bhakti means loving devotion for Paramātmā. However Bhagwān Swāminārāyan adds the word *mahātmya*:

mahātmyajnānayugbhurisneho bhaktischa mādhave

– Shikshāpatrī 103

– bhakti is intense love for Paramātmā, with a full-fledged realisation of His greatness, grandeur and glory.

Forms of bhakti

In the Nārad Bhakti Sutras (1/1) Nāradji defines bhakti as: *sā (bhakti) twasmin parampremaswarupā* – that which induces supreme love for Bhagwān.

In the Bhāgvatam, the child devotee Prahlād describes nine forms of bhakti, commonly known as *Navdhā bhakti* (7/5/23).

नवधा भक्ति



Bhagwān Kapildeva giving wisdom to his mother Devahuti



Ādi Shankarāchārya

¹ bhakti – devotion

² bhakta – devotee

Navdha Bhakti of the
Rāmcharitmanas (3/58/8).

- (1) Satsang – associating with sadhus
- (2) kathā
- (3) Guru bhakti
- (4) Extolling virtues & glory without deceit
- (5) Mantra japa – bhajan with faith
- (6) Control of the senses – imbibing dharma, good character & detachment
- (7) To see Rāma in everything
- (8) Contentment & to avoid fault finding
- (9) Straightforwardness & intense faith in Bhagwān without self-pity



Shukdevaji devotionally listens to
Bhagwān Veda Vyās recite the
Bhāgavatam.

1. *Shravanam* – listening to His *kathā* and *kirtans*
2. *Kirtanam* – singing His kirtans, as well as extolling His glory by *kathā*
3. *Vishnoho smaranam* – recalling His episodes mentally
4. *Pādsevanam* – to offer serve Him physically, His realised Sadhu and bhaktas
5. *Archauam* – to offer *pujan* using sandalwood paste, kumkum, flowers, fruits, etc.
6. *Vandanam* – to bow to Him e.g. by doing *dandvat pranāms*
7. *Dāsyam* – to offer devotion with humility, as a *dās* – servant
8. *Sakhyam* – to offer devotion as a close friend
9. *Ātmanivedanam* – surrendering wholeheartedly at His lotus-feet

Shravanam

This means listening to Paramātmā’s name, divine *lilā*, glory and redemptive attributes:

|| *shravanam nāmacharitagunamādinām shrutirbhavet* ||

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan defines *shravan* bhakti as: to listen to ShriHari’s *charitras* (divine actions) from a person who observes dharma. *Shravan* bhakti also means devotionally listening to the *charitras* of avatārs and their devotees such as Prahlād, Dhruva, Priyavrat, Ambrish, Uddhav, etc. (Haricharitrāmṛt Sāgar 1/65).

The main *indriya* (sense) involved for this is *shravan* (ears).

Ideal examples of devotees who devotionally listened to Bhagwān’s *kathā* include: Kings Janak, Parikshit, Ambrish, Priyavrat, Pruthu, Janmejaya, and the following *bhaktas*: Hanumānji, Uddhav, Dhundhukāri, Shaunak rishi and Gārgi.

Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami observes that, “the jiva is purified by *navdhā bhakti*, but not as effectively as by *kathā*. There is no factor (*sāadhan*) more powerful than speech (Swāmini Vāto 1/15). The jiva’s *antahkaran* (heart) is cleansed by listening to *kathā*. The more it is cleansed, the better he understands the import (of *kathā*) and the more *shānti* (peace) he experiences (Swāmini Vāto 2/109).

The causes of *ashānti* – misery and unhappiness – are: *vāsanā* and *swabhāva* – baser instincts such as lust, anger, greed, jealousy, hate, envy, etc. To eradicate these, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan advocates listening to *kathā* as the most effective endeavour; more effective than mortifying the body by *vrats* such as *taptakruchhra chāndrāyan* (Vachanāmṛt Kāriyāni 12).

The rituals concerning *kathā* are discussed in Ch.11 – Pārāyan.

Kirtanam

Kirtan bhakti means to vociferously chant or sing Bhagwān's name (*mantra japa*), *lilā charitras* (divine episodes) and attributes:

|| *nāmlilāgunādināmuchchairbhāshā tu kirtanam.* ||

Additionally, *kirtan bhakti* means to sing *padas* (devotional poetry) which describe and glorify Bhagwān's attire, ornaments, divine persona or His supreme glory and greatness.

Bhagwān Vishnu glorifies *kirtan* to Nārādji:

|| *Nāham vasāmi Vaikunthe yoginām hrudaye-pi cha, madbhaktyā yātrā gāyanti tatra tisthāmi Narada.* ||

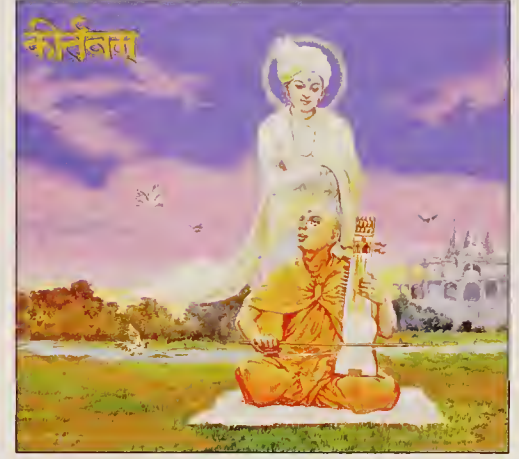
– Ādi Purāna

– I do not reside in Vaikunth, nor in the hearts of yogis, I reside where my devotees sing my glory.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan adds that *kirtan* also means to recite, study, learn and teach those *shāstras* which are related to Bhagwān and His devotees (Haricharitrāmṛt Sāgar 1/65).

Bhaktas renowned for their *kirtan bhakti*: Nārādji, Vālmiki, Shukdevaji, Ajāmil, Gajendra, Tulsidās, Ālwārs, Narsinh Mehtā, Mirābāi, Swami Haridās (Tānsen's guru), Gaurang (Chaitanya), Nānakdeva, Tukārām, Tyāgrāj, Pushti sampradāya's eight poets and Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's eight paramhansa poets, namely: Muktanand Swami, Brahmānand Swami, Premānand Swami, Nishkulānand Swami, Devānand Swami, Bhumānand Swami, Manjukeshānand Swami and Dayānand Swami.

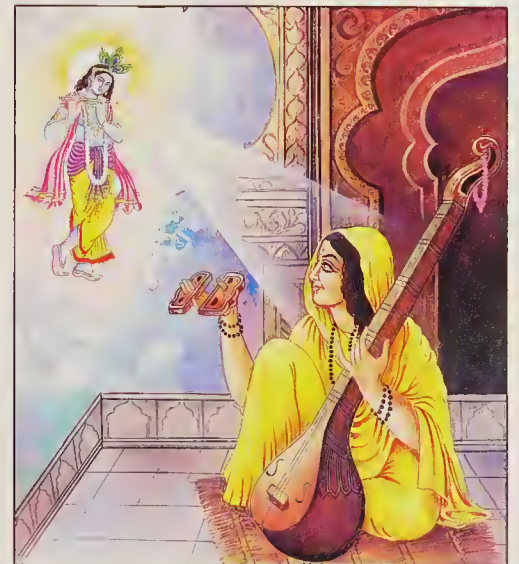
In the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, daily rituals which involve *kirtan* include: *kathā*, *prabhātiyā*, *ārti*, *thāl*, *dhun*, *mantra japa*, *mālā*, *ghodi*, *nitya cheshtā* and chanting the Janmangal Nāmāvali. Details appear in appropriate sections in this book.



Premānand Swami's devotional singing pleases Bhagwān Swāminārāyan.



Narsinh Mehtā



Mirābāi

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan points out a formidable obstacle that may arise in *kirtan bhakti*. Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā I-22, He says, “the singer should not sing to please others, nor for fame or wealth. He should sing only to please Bhagwān and remember Him constantly while singing.”

Smaranam

Smaran and *smṛuti* both mean ‘to recall’. Mentally recollecting anything related to Bhagwān is *smaran bhakti*.

yathākathanchinmanasā sambandhah smrutiruchyate

Specifically it means mentally recollecting: Bhagwān’s powerful and redemptive name, *lilā charitras*, divine attributes and meditation of His divine form and attractive *murtis*.

The Bhāgvatam (12/12/54) cites five ways of performing *smaran bhakti*:

- (i) recalling Bhagwān’s name in one’s heart
- (ii) remembering Bhagwān’s *lilā charitras*
- (iii) recalling and awareness of Bhagwān’s divine attributes
- (iv) meditation of Bhagwān’s form, and
- (v) unbroken mental rapport with Him.

These five *smaran bhaktis* are instrumental for Bhagwān’s *parābhakti* – supreme devotion.

In the Vachanāmṛut (Gadhadā I-3), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan emphasises the importance and benefits of recalling Bhagwān’s *lilā*:

“Even one who constantly sees Bhagwān’s form in his heart should recall His divine actions and incidents in His various avatārs in various places... if at the time of death, he (devotee) forgets Bhagwān’s form, but remembers the divine actions performed by Him or remembers satsangis and sadhus, then by that association he will remember Bhagwān’s form. Thereby, that person attains an elevated spiritual status and benefits tremendously.” Bhagwān Swāminārāyan then reveals that He performs grand Vishnu yagnas, annually celebrates Janmāshtami, Ekādashī and other *utsavs*, so that even if a sinner recalls these at the time of death, he will attain Bhagwān’s abode.



Five year old Dhruva’s *smaran bhakti* earned him Bhagwān Vishnu’s divine darshan and blessings.



Jatāyū’s *smaran bhakti* for Rāma to save Sītāji from Rāvana

Bhaktas who performed *smaran bhakti*: Sanakādik rishis, Vālmiki rishi, Vidurji, Shabari, Jatāyu, Dhruva, Prahlād, Gajendra, Gopis, Bhishma and Kunti.

Pādsevanam

Pād means Bhagwān's lotus-feet. *Pādsevā*, commonly known as *sevā bhakti*, means to serve Bhagwān. The Upanishads also enjoin that one should equally serve the guru – who has realised Bhagwān – as one serves Bhagwān:

*Yasya deve parā bhakti yathā deve tathā gurau
Tasyai te kathitā hi arthāhā prakāshante mahātmanah.*

– Svetāshvatara Upanishad (6/23)

Such a guru is also known as Satpurush, *Gunātīt*, *Brahmanishth* and *Shrotriya*. In the Bhāgavatam (10/84/12), Shri Krishna extols the glory of *sevā* of such enlightened Satpurushs to rishis: “*sevā* of only one *muhurt* of a *viveki* Satpurush destroys sins.”

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan concurs that profound *sevā* of Bhagwān **and** His realised sadhu:

- (i) destroys a person's *swabhāva* and *vāsanā* (Vachanāmrut Gadhadā II-7, II-25)
- (ii) the *jiva* attains moksha, which is not possible by any other endeavour (Gadhadā II-28, II-40)
- (iii) the *jiva* gains strength – to subdue the *indriyas* and *antahkaran* (Gadhadā II-63)
- (iv) the *jiva* attains in his heart bhakti with the *mahātmya* (glory and greatness) of Bhagwān (Vartāl 3). Only by such bhakti is a *jiva*'s *vāsanā* and *swabhāva* destroyed and he gains redemptive virtues (Sārangpur 5, Loyā 16)
- (v) the *jiva* becomes a supreme bhakta (Vartāl 5)
- (vi) the *jiva* earns Bhagwān's grace (Gadhadā II-28)

The rituals of *sevā* of Bhagwān in a mandir also include: making garlands, cleaning, maintenance, serving devotees and visitors, looking after the mandir's – garden, farm and animals, and many other forms are depicted in the photographs on p.90 & 91.



top: Lakshmi serving Vishnu
bottom: Prāgji Bhakta sincerely fulfills his guru, Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami's wish, by sewing a huge canopy

examples of bhaktas who offered *sevā* to Bhagwān or the guru in the manner discussed: Nishādraj (Bhil – Rāma's friend), Angad, Vālī, Lakshman, Sitā, Vibhishan, Hanumānji, Shabari, Kevat, Ahalyā, Satyakam Jābāl, Āruni-Upamanyu, Lakshmi and Bali rājā.

Sevā performed in mandirs



embroidering Bhagwān's robes



cooking naivedyam



serving pilgrims



serving prasadam during festivals



annakut preparations



donation sevā



footwear sevā



making garlands



gaushālā sevā



parking sevā



making food packets for disaster victims (Gujarat floods 2006)



cleaning



gardening

Archanam

Archan bhakti means to worship with physical offerings such as fruits, flowers, leaves, water and other *dravyas*, as well as *mānas puja* – mental worship. In the Bhāgvatam (11/27/6-53) Shri Krishna Bhagwān guides Uddhavji about *archan bhakti*. The fundamental requisite for *archan bhakti* is the staunch belief that Paramātmā manifests in the eight types of *murtis* through which He accepts the bhakta's offerings (Vachanāmrut Gadhadā I-68).

The eight types of *murtis* are:

*Shaili dārumayi lauhi lepyā lekhyā cha saikati,
manomayi manimayi pratimāstavidhā smrutā.*

– Bhāgvatam (11/27/12)

– of stone, wood, metal, paste (such as sandalwood), painted, sand, mental (visualised in the mind) and precious gem.

There are also two types of *murtis*: *chal* (mobile) and *achal* (fixed) (Bhāgvatam 11/27/13).

The rituals of *archan bhakti* concerning both physical *puja* and mental (*mānsi*) *puja* are discussed in Ch.28.

Examples of exuberant *archan bhakti*: Shabari, king Pruthu, Ambrish Rājā, Gajendra (elephant), Eknāth, Jnāneshwar, Tukārām, Mirābāi, Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami, Bhagatji Mahārāj, Shāstriji Mahārāj, Yogiji Mahārāj and Pramukh Swami Mahārāj.



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj lovingly bathes Shri Harikrishna Mahārāj in Gauri Kund, Kedārñāth (1987).



Yogiji Mahārāj's immense humility
for Bhagwān Swāminārāyan

Vandanam

Vandan bhakti means to humbly offer *pranāms* to Bhagwān with *mahimā* (glory), faith and singular devotion.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan enjoins how male and female devotees should offer prostrations. Males should offer *ashtāṅg pranāms*, with eight parts of the body touching the floor, namely, feet, arms, knees, head, chest, eyes, mind and speech. Females should offer *pañchāṅg pranāms*, with five parts touching the floor, namely, hands, head, mind, speech and eyes (see details on p.250). To smear the dust from Bhagwān's lotus-feet on one's head, is also *vandan* bhakti (Haricharitrāmṛt Sāgar 1/67).

This form of bhakti requires extreme humility by eradicating one's ego. Offering humble bhakti, reflecting upon Bhagwān's infinite grace on one self and accepting Him as one's Swami (Master) pleases Him. Bearing these sentiments in one's heart, one experiences divine bliss and glory.

In the Pandava Gitā, Bhagwān extols the glory of offering one true *pranām*:

|| *Eko-pi Krushnasya kratah pranāmo dashāshvamedhāvabhruthenatulyah,
dashāshvamedhi punareti janma Krushnapranāmi na punarbhavāya.* ||

– even one *pranām* offered to Bhagwān Shri Krishna is equal to *avabhruth* bathings performed in ten Ashwamedha *yagnas*. However, rebirth remains after the Ashwamedha *yagnas*, whereas it ceases after *pranām* to Bhagwān.

For adults, ego is the greatest obstacle in not being able to offer *dandvat pranāms* to deities in mandirs. However the young experience shyness and awkwardness. Parents need to inform them from a young age about *pranām*'s glory and how to perform them. Sadly teenaged Hindus raised abroad also experience marked awkwardness in offering *dandvat pranāms* to deities and namaskār to people. They would rather offer a handshake than namaskār. Amazingly the same youths will readily perform the *pranām* gesture and a vigorous forward bow on beginning a martial arts session! Both parents and youths need to reconcile this. They only need to ask

Examples of vandan bhakti:
Vibhishan, Bharatji, Tulsidās,
Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand
Swami, Bhagatji Mahārāj, Shāstriji
Mahārāj, Yogiji Mahārāj and
Pramukh Swami Mahārāj.



themselves, ‘Why should one feel shy in imbibing humility which leads to *parā vidyā* (moksha)?’ while martial art is merely an *aparā vidyā* – mundane, which does not grant moksha.

Dāsyam

Dās means servant. *Dāsyā bhakti* means to always offer one’s karmas and humble devotion with total surrenderance – mentally, physically and verbally – to Bhagwān, as His servant:

Dāsyām karmārpanam tasya kainkaryamapi sarvathā.

Dāsyā bhakti also includes obeying the commands of the Gunātīt Satpurush with faith and affection and offering humble service.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan extols the glory and benefits of *dāsyā bhakti*; that one becomes a staunch devotee by behaving as the servant of Paramātmā’s servant, and by realising that, ‘all these devotees are great while I am inferior compared to them’. All the evil instincts, of a person who behaves in this manner, are destroyed, and day by day, noble virtues such as *gnān*, *vairāgya* and *bhakti*, continue to flourish within him (Gadhadā I-58). Even if such a person does not understand anything, and behaves as the servant of Bhagwān’s servants, he still becomes a true *bhakta* of Bhagwān in this very life (Gadhadā II-62).

In practical rituals, *dāsyā bhakti* means to serve humbly in a mandir by cleaning, and maintaining its premises, humbly serving sadhus and devotees mentally, physically and verbally. This means to be polite to them and to care about their needs – of food, water, parking, footwear, etc.

Sakhyam

Sakhya means friend. *Sakhya bhakti* means to have immutable faith in Bhagwān, and to offer affectionate devotion to Him as a friend:

Vishvāso mitravruttishcha sakhyam dvividhamiritam

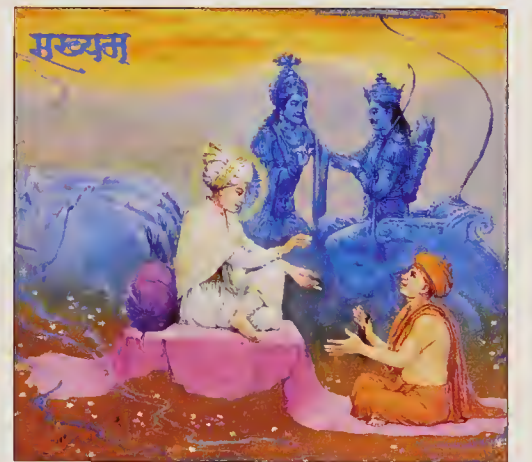
Bhagwān Swāminārāyan adds, “To behave as one does with one’s body, wife, son, wealth, and as Draupadi and Arjuna offered greater affection (to Shri Krishna), is known as *sakhā bhakti*. He (the devotee) believes and remains



Hanumānji exemplifies the ideals of dāsātva bhakti in Sanātān Dharma

examples of *dāsyā bhakti*: Bharatji, Vidurji, Hanumānji, Lakshman, Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami (and all the Gunātīt successors), as well as Mulji Brahmachāri, Dādā Khāchar and Parvatbhai during Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s time.

Bhagwān Shri Krishna’s friendship with Arjuna



Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s rapport as a friend with his poet paramhansa Brahmānand Swami

examples of *sakhya bhav*: Vibhishan, Guha and Sugriv for Shri Rāma. Arjuna, Draupadi, Uddhav and Sudama for Shri Krishna. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan regarded Brahmānand Swami, Sura Khachar and Rato Basio as *sakhā*.



King Ambrish's implicit surrenderance to Bhagwān Vishnu



The Gopis' ātmanivedan bhakti for Shri Krishna

undaunted with the fact that Paramātmā behaves as a human and yet all His actions are redemptive. He does not for a moment entertain a human trait (*dosh*) in Him. No matter what miseries afflict him, he has firm faith in Him” (Haricharitrāmṛt Sāgar 1/67).

This form of bhakti is not practically possible for devotees today, since it is Bhagwān who chooses His *sakhā*.

Ātmanivedanam

Ātmanivedan bhakti means to faithfully and devotionally surrender one's body, mind, wealth and family to Bhagwān.

Shri Krishna Bhagwān states that, “He who wishes the good of his *ātmā*, should offer to Bhagwān: *yagna*, donation, *tapas*, *japa*, bhakti rituals according to his dharma and social status, philanthropic acts, righteous actions, wife, son, house and his life” (Bhāgavatam 11/3/28). To Uddhavji, he reveals, “He who surrenders on my name, his farm, business, city or town, for the upkeep of the daily puṣā and celebration of *utsavs* in mandirs, attains divine powers similar to mine” (Bhāgavatam 11/27/51).

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan extols the glorious benefits of one who offers everything to Bhagwān. “Vāmanji took Bali Rājā's kingdom of three *loks*, and in two strides covered 14 realms. Then Bali Rājā offered his own body to Vāmanji to place the third step. In this way Bali devoutly offered his all to Bhagwān and yet he did not falter from His bhakti. On seeing such unparalleled bhakti, Bhagwān ultimately became bound by him... To this day, Bhagwān forever stands at Bali's gate, never out of Bali's sight, not even for a moment” (Gadhadā I-61).

Practically, one's circumstances may not permit surrendering everything to Bhagwān. However, the vital factor in offering *ātmanivedan bhakti* is to surrender one's mind to Bhagwān and His Satpurush. For only by such surrenderance can they purify the *bhakta's* mind. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan promises, “I have firmly resolved that I shall not allow any flaw whatsoever to remain in anyone who sincerely surrenders his mind without the slightest doubt, to Me” (Gadhadā I-73).

Examples of *ātmanivedan bhakti*: Prahlād, Ambrish Rājā, Rantideva Rājā, Bali Rājā, Gopis, Draupadi, Kunti and Uddhav. During Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's time: Dādā Khāchar – the Kāthi chief of Gadhadā, Lādudān Bārot – who became Brahmānand Swami, and many stalwart samnyasis who forsook their own *muths* and disciples to become *paramhansas* of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, such as Ānandānand Swami of Ayodhyā, and Swayamprakāshānand Swami of Bengal.

Four other important forms of bhakti

(10) *Anuvrutti bhakti* – obeying the Satpurush's commands, as well as his unvoiced wishes.

(11) *Nirdoshbuddhi bhakti* – to cultivate an understanding that Bhagwān's human manifestation is divine and without *māyic* attributes.

(12) *Premlakshanā bhakti* – intense and unalloyed bhakti similar to that of the Gopis.

(13) *Bhidā bhakti* – This colloquial Gujarati term was phrased by Yogiji Mahārāj. It means to tolerate. Just as one tolerates all forms of pressures and inconveniences in mundane family life, one should similarly tolerate inconveniences and hardships for Bhagwān and His Sadhu. This is a unique form of bhakti and public *sādhana*, which also pleases them and one experiences *shānti* at heart.

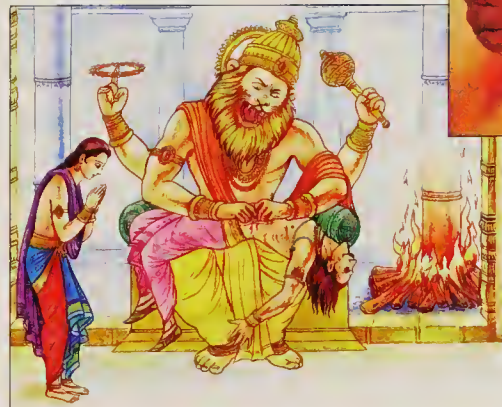
This is the fastest way of eradicating one's baser instincts, relative to performing *sādhana* alone in a forest or mountain cave like the *yogis* of yore. Yogiji Mahārāj vigorously propounded *bhidā* bhakti and this form of public (*samuh*) *sādhana* is a salient feature of the BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya.

Navdhā bhakti for instant spiritual strength

Q. How can one attain instant spiritual strength?

A. One who has love for Bhagwān and His Sadhu and serves them with intense faith, along with *Navdhā bhakti*, attains instant strength.

– Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, Vachanāmrut Gadhadā II-63



bhakta Prahlād's ātmanivedan bhakti



tableau depicting Rantideva Rājā's virtue of charity
(BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Neasden, London)



13. Utsavs (Festivals)

- Celebrating utsavs
- Utsavs in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya
- The Hindu calendar & seasons
- Major calendrical festival rituals in pictures

Celebrating utsavs

People keep craving for something new, more creative and daring. Why? To relieve stress, boredom, anxiety, moodlessness and information overload invariably created by modern living.

The brain yearns for new forms of entertainment and relaxation, to stimulate and to prevent it sinking into a quagmire of boredom. But do these forms really relieve the symptoms? It is rather like quicksand. The more one tries to extricate oneself, the deeper one sinks. The ancient rishis and seers were well aware of man's inherent nature of becoming bored easily, so they judiciously spangled the Hindu way of life with *utsavs* – festivals. Celebrating festivals breaks the humdrum of daily living. It boosts man mentally and invigorates him spiritually. This leads to true contentment.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the cultural heritage of India has been transmitted, not through the annals of historical texts but through *utsavs*. In these festivals the seers also incorporated the awareness of the fleeting nature of the human body, teaching people to use it, while health prevailed, to attain the ultimate goal of realising Paramātmā.

By enjoining injunctions about festivals, the seers also bore in mind the physical and spiritual health of man. Behavioural traits such as greed, hate, envy and jealousy, are sublimated by giving them a spiritual realm – since the sentiments of most festivals are centred on devotion to Paramātmā. For example, in *Vasant* (spring) and *Sharad* (post-monsoon) there is an increase in *rajoguna* – the attribute of activity and extravagance. Therefore they advocated the festival of *Fuldol* (during *Vasant*) – playing with colours and coloured water. Similarly in *Sharad*, one plays *Rās* or *Garbā* – Gujarati folk-dancing during *Navrātri* (*Nortā*). Even today, in the rural areas of India, the purity and orthodoxy of the *Navrātri* festival prevail, where the sexes

उत्सव

“No country upon Earth rejoices in a longer list of holidays (utsavs) and seasons of rejoicing, qualified by fasts (upavāsa, vrat), vigils (jāgarana) and seasons of mortification than India.”

– Sir M. Monier Williams,
Boden Professor of Sanskrit, Oxford



a young devotee leading a procession of Ganeshji to perform parikramā of a mandir on Jal Zilami Ekādashi



the children's wing participating with musical instruments

opp. page: bālikās with kalashas preparing for shobhā yātrā during an utsav

dance separately. In the cities, 'disco dancing' and promiscuity have vilified tradition and the festival's sanctity.

A good example of the health consideration for the people, by the seers, occurs in the sacred month of *Shrāvan*, during the rains. Constantly clouded skies and high humidity dampen the digestive fire. Therefore Ayurveda's *shāstras* recommend moderation in food intake. Hence the seers advocated fasting by allowing only one meal a day for householders. Sadhus observe stricter forms of fasting (see Ch.32).

During the *Sharad* season, following the monsoon, although the clouds have cleared, the solar position is such that an aggravation of *pitta* (bile) occurs in the body. This can lead to fevers of various kinds. To nullify this, milk and parched rice with sugar are recommended – *dudh paunwā*. This is the food traditionally offered to Paramātmā at night on the Sharad Punam festival.

During winter the digestive fire is at its peak. Tradition therefore advocates eating rich and nutritious foods. On Makar Sankrānti (January 14th), the day of alms-giving,

The women's wing participating in the Mandir Mahotsav procession prior to the consecration of the BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Neasden, London, August 1995



people forget their grievances and jealousies and vow to work towards a harmonious life. This is effected by giving each other sesame seed balls and jaggery. Sesame seed symbolises affection and jaggery, sweetness of speech.

Utsavs also inject vigour and vitality into the cultural and religious traditions and the *bhāvnās*, and prevent them from stagnation.

Through *utsavs*, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan inspired His *paramhansas* and devotees to the heights of bhakti, by promoting art, crafts, music and the composition of bhajans rich in imagery and alliteration. Nishkulānand Swami, though a poet, once made a mind-boggling ‘twelve-door’ swing during the Hindolā festival for Bhagwān Swāminārāyan. Other poets like Premānand, Muktānand, Brahmānand and Devānand composed thousands of bhajans encompassing *utsavs* like Rāmanavmi, Fuldol, Hindolā, Janmāshtami, Diwāli and Annakut. Continuing this tradition today, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj has also boosted Indian art and crafts in the *mahotsavs* (mega festivals) in India and abroad. In the Cultural Festivals of India celebrated in London in 1985 and in Edison, U.S.A., in 1991, and the Mandir Mahotsav in London, in 1995, the ārtistic talents of Indian Culture peaked. The ārtisans constructed exquisite life-sized gates, mandirs, floats and various Hindu symbols from only cane, paper pulp and chalk.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan reveals the lofty sentiment of holding *mahotsavs*, in Vachanāmṛt Gadhadā I-3,

“I perform Vishnuyāga and, hold large congregations on festivals like Janmāshtami, Ekādashī, etc. with the purpose that if anyone who attends these festivals, even if he is a sinful man, he will be redeemed and will attain the abode of Paramātmā, if he recalls them on his death bed.”

Utsavs also serve another edifying purpose; the transformation of lawless and immoral members of society. Joban Pagi, a notorious bandit, and a sinner like Nāthibāi, the prostitute of Jetalpur, became staunch disciples of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan after attending and participating in festivals.



‘Lālji’ – the child form of Shri Krishna during Janmāshtami



young devotee offering bili leaves to Mahādevaji during the month of Shrāvan

following pages:

Darshan at the doorstep; Bhagwān Jagannāthji graces jubilant devotees during Rath Yātrā, Amdavad (2005)





Utsavs also break barriers of status or social group. They bring people together from various strata of society, from home and abroad to do *sevā*. During *utsavs*, *bhaktas* get an opportunity to do *sevā* (service) and offer devotion. There are many forms of *sevā* such as: providing lodging, catering, cleaning and security for the devotees. Such *sevā* increases the devotees' respect (*mahimā*) for each other and creates bonhomie and *suhridbhāva* (solidarity).

Regarding public gatherings, today's medical research has begun to support them for maintenance of health and longevity of the individuals. Cultures and communities in which the individuals are introverted – who keep to themselves, become more susceptible to disease. Modern societies are becoming too organised and therefore estrange people. But people need people to maintain health.

As mentioned earlier, the brain needs stimulation. “A bored brain is just as stressed, as one from information overload,” reveal Ornstein and Sobel in, *The Healing Brain*. Even a lonely monkey will do anything for the reward of sighting another monkey. In the Middle Ages, lords of castles paid high wages to a person who would live as a hermit near the castle - to display their genuine hermit! Most people left after a while, even at the risk of starvation. Apparently, the lack of social interaction proved too stressful.

People also need change. Curiosity and variation keep an individual at a mental peak. Too much of the same thing also upsets the mental equilibrium. If we eat our favourite food dish every day for a week, we wouldn't feel like touching it the following week. To counter boredom, the rishis incorporated festivals at regular intervals throughout the year (ref. p.105 for chart of Hindu months and seasons). Festivals give *bhaktas* an opportunity to express their devotional sentiments towards Paramātmā. *Satsang* and *kathā* during festivals promote spiritual health, solace, brotherhood and unity. This in turn maintains peace and harmony in the community.



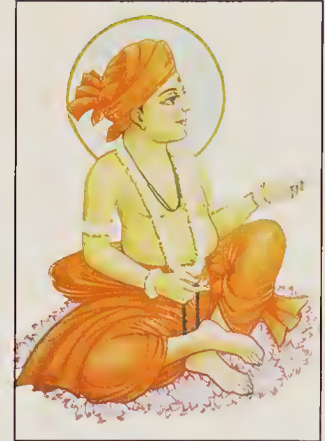
Diwāli – children celebrate victory of good over evil with fireworks

Utsavs in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya



1. Posh *sud* 15 (Dec. Jan.) – Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami's *dikshā mahotsav*.
2. January 14 – Makar Sankrānti. Festival of alms-giving.
3. Mahā *sud* 5 (Jan. Feb.) – Vasant Panchami – Shikshāpatri written by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan. Births of Nishkulānand Swami, Brahmānand Swami and Brahmaswarup Shāstriji Mahārāj.
4. Mahā *vad* 14 (Jan. Feb.) – Mahā Shivrātri – *utsav* of Shri Shiva.
5. Fāgan *sud* 14 (Feb. Mar.) – Holi
6. Fāgan *sud* 15 (Feb. Mar.) – Fuldol – Rangotsav – Festival of Colours. Birth of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Mahārāj.
7. Chaitra *sud* 9 (Mar. Apr.) – *Rāmanavmi – Incarnation of Shri Rāmachandra Bhagwān and Swāminārāyan Jayanti – Incarnation of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan.
8. Vaishakh *vad* 12 (Apr. May) – Birth of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Mahārāj.
9. Jeth *sud* 4 (May Jun.) – Pramukh Varni Din – HDH Pramukh Swami Mahārāj appointed Head of BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā by Brahmaswarup Shāstriji Mahārāj.
10. Jeth *sud* 10 (May Jun.) – Bhagwān Swāminārāyan returned to his divine abode – Akshardhām.
11. Āshādh *sud* 2 (Jun. Jul.) – Rath Yātrā – Chariot festival. Devotees pull Bhagwān Jagannāthji's chariot.
12. Āshādh *sud* 10 (Jun. Jul.) – Bhagwān Swāminārāyan begins Kalyān Yātrā.
12. Āshādh *sud* 11 (Jun. Jul.) – *Deva Shayani Ekādashi – Bhagwān Nārāyan retires for a four month rest.
13. Āshādh *sud* 15 (Jun. Jul.) – Guru Purnimā – Birth of Bhagwān Veda Vyās – spiritual guru is offered *pujan*.
14. Āshādh *vad* 1 (Jun. Jul.) – Hindolā *utsav* begins – festival of swings, for one month.
15. Shrāvan *sud* 1 (Jul. Aug.) – Start of Shrāvan, most sacred month. Fasting for one month.
16. Shrāvan *sud* 15 (Jul. Aug.) – Punam. Rakshā Bandhan. Sister ties a *rakshā* (*rākhadi*, *rākhi*) on her brother's wrist.

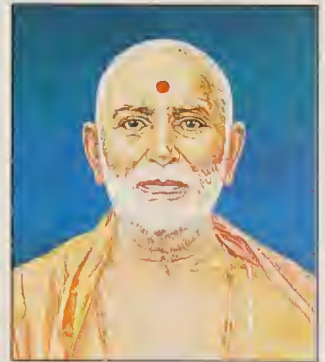
jayantis of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's spiritual successors



*Aso sud 15 – Sharad Punam
Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami*



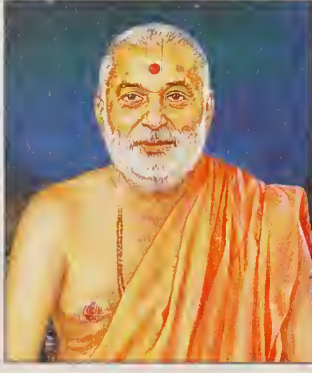
*Fāgan sud 15,
Bhagatji Mahārāj*



*Mahā sud 5,
Shāstriji Mahārāj*



*Vaishakh vad 12,
Yogiji Mahārāj*

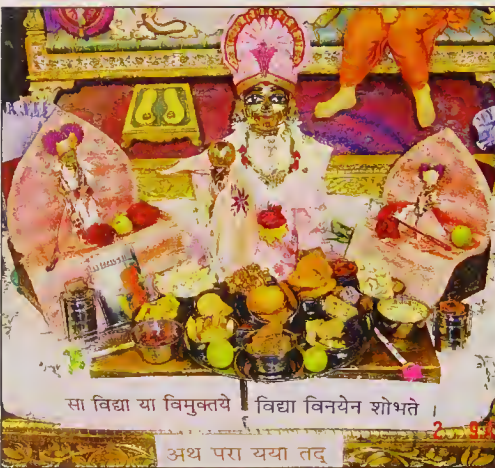


Magshar sud 8,
Pramukh Swami Mahārāj

* These are the five major fasts to be observed as waterless (*nirjal*) in the BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya, enjoined by Shāstriji Mahārāj



Hātadi – new vegetable harvest offered on Deva Prabodhini Ekādashi



Dhanurmās offerings

17. Shrāvan vad 6 (Jul. Aug.) – Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's arrival in Loj.
18. Shrāvan vad 8 (Jul. Aug.) – *Krishna Janmāshtmi – Incarnation of Shri Krishna Bhagwān.
19. Bhādarvā sud 4 (Aug. Sep.) – Ganesh Chaturthi – *pujan* of Shri Ganeshji.
20. Bhādarvā sud 11 (Aug. Sep.) – *Jal Zilani Ekādashi – Bāl Mukund & Shri Ganesh taken to an expanse of water to offer *pujan* and boat ride.
21. Āso sud 10 (Sep. Oct.) – Dasherā – Burning the effigy of Rāvana, the demon vanquished by Shri Rāma.
22. Āso sud 15 (Sep. Oct.) – Sharad Punam – Incarnation of Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami.
23. Āso vad 14 (Sep. Oct.) – Kāli Chaudash – Hanumān *pujan*.
24. Āso vad 15 (Sep. Oct.) - Amās – Diwāli – Festival of Lights; Lakshmi and Sharda (New account ledgers are offered *pujan*).
25. Kārtik sud 1 (Oct. Nov.) – Hindu New Year's Day. Annakut *utsav* – New harvest – hundreds of food dishes offered to Bhagwān.
26. Kārtik sud 5 (Oct. Nov.) – Lābh Pancham. Business starts officially. *Pujan* of shops and offices.
27. Kārtik sud 10 (Oct. Nov.) – Ārti *utsav* – *ārti* composed by Muktānand Swami.
28. Kārtik sud 11 (Oct. Nov.) – *Deva Prabodhini Ekādashi – Bhagwān Nārāyan awakens from a four month rest. New vegetable harvest (*hātadi*) offered to Paramātmā (*shākotsav*).
29. Kārtik sud 15 (Oct. Nov.) – Deva Diwāli – victory of the deities over evil.
30. Magshar sud 8 (Nov. Dec.) – Birth of HDH Shri Pramukh Swami Mahārāj.
31. Magshar vad 10 (Nov. Dec.) – Dhanurmās begins – Bhagwān goes to school for one month. Writing materials, books, toys and sweets, especially *shiro*, are offered.
32. Pātotsav – Every year all *shikharbaddh* and Hari mandirs of the sampradāya celebrate their Pātotsav. This is the anniversary of the day on which the *prāna pratishthā* of the *murtis* was first performed (see Ch.9).



The Hindu Calendar and Seasons

(and how it relates to the calendar we use today) © Swāminārāyan Aksharpith: Hindu Festivals, 2005



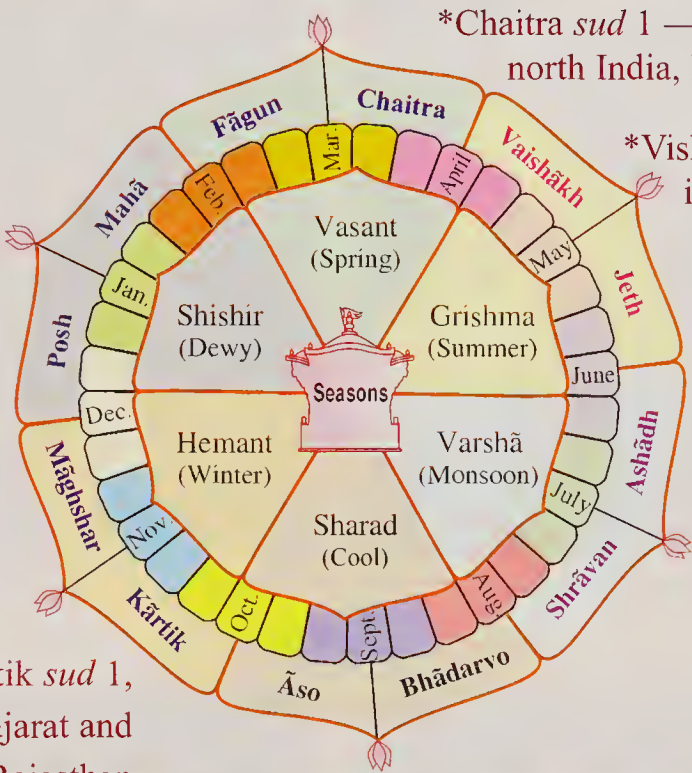
shishir (dewy)



vasant (spring)



grishma (summer)



Nutan Varsh — *Kārtik sud 1,
New Year's Day in Gujarat and
Rajasthan



hemant (winter)



sharad (cool)



varshā (monsoon)

Major Calendrical Utsav Rituals (in pictures)

Bestu varsh (New year's day – Kārtik sud 1)



Mahāpujā on Bestu varsh (New year's day)



Annakut

Makar Sankrānti (Uttarāyan) (January 14)



Makar Sankrānti (offering alms)



Nārāyan Hare Sacchidanand Prabho! (begging alms)

Pongal parva (January 15)



Surya pongal



Mattu pongal

Vasant Panchmi (Mahā sud 5)



Saraswati puṇā, Kolkata



Vasant kumbha puṇ

Mahā Shivrātri (Mahā vad 14)



Mahā Shivrātri abhishek

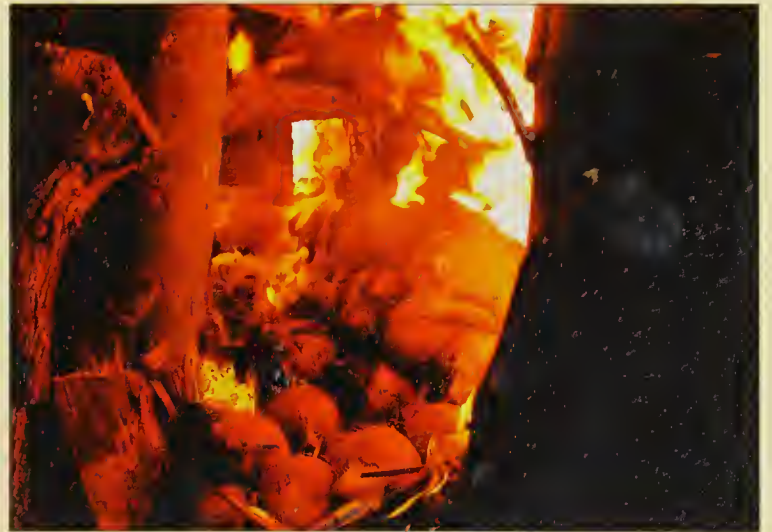


procession of Mahadevji's crown, Somnāth Mahādeva

Holi (Fāgan sud 14)



Holi (BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, London)



offering coconuts

Dhuleti (Pushpadolotsav) (Fāgan sud 15)



spraying colours



*offerings of roasted grams, dates with ghee
& popped jowar and corn (fagwa)*

Rāma Navmi and Swāminārāyan Jayanti (Chaitra sud 9)



Rāma Navmi



offering of panchājiri



Swāminārāyan Jayanti

Rath Yātrā (Āshādh sud 2)



Rath Yātrā, Puri, Orissa



pulling Bhagwān's rath

Guru Purnimā (Āshādh sud 15)

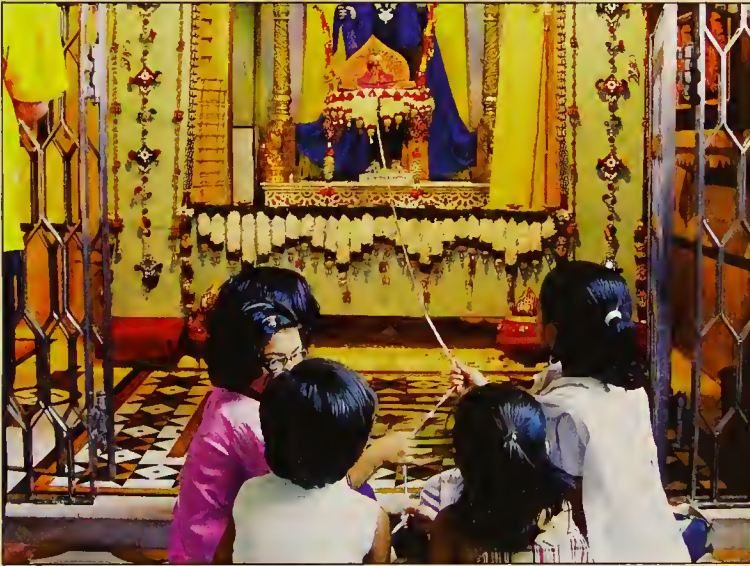


Bhagwān Veda Vyās's Jayanti



Guru's puja

Hindolā (Āshādh vad 1)



swinging utsav-vigraha Deity in Hindolā



Hindolā-making competition

Rakshā Bandhan (Shrāvan sud 15)



sister performs brother's puja and ties rākhadi (rākhi)

Krishna Janmāshtami (Shrāvan vad 8)



swinging Lālji in a silver cradle



enacting Krishna lilā

Ganesh utsav



grand procession of Ganeshji, Mumbai (Bhādarvā sud 4)



Ganesh visarjan (Bhādarvā sud 11)

sacred Chāturmas (four months of monsoon)

*vrat – upavās (fasting): ektānā,
dhārnā-pārnā, chāndrāyan
kathā pārāyan,*

*additional forms of worship –
mālā, mantra japa, dandvat,
pradakshinā, reading shāstras,
visiting mandir daily, abhishek,
pilgrimage*



milk abhishek & bali offerings to Mahadevji



pradakshinā

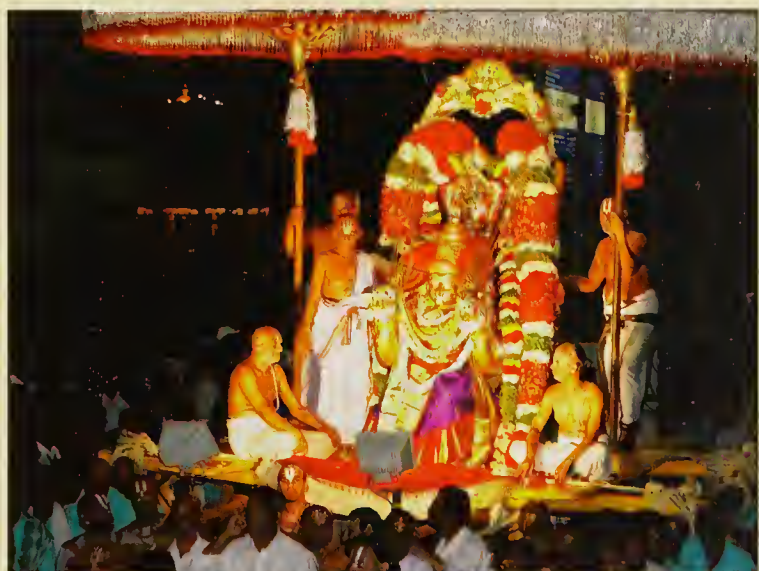


balika wing holding kathā pārāyan

Navrātri (Nortā) (Āso sud 1)



pujan of Shakti Mātā followed by rās-garbā



Brahmotsavam, Tirumālā, south India

Vijayā Dashmi (Dasherā) (Āso sud 10)



burning Rāvana's effigy



offerings of fafda and jalebi

Diwāli parva – Dhan Teras (Āso vad 13-15)



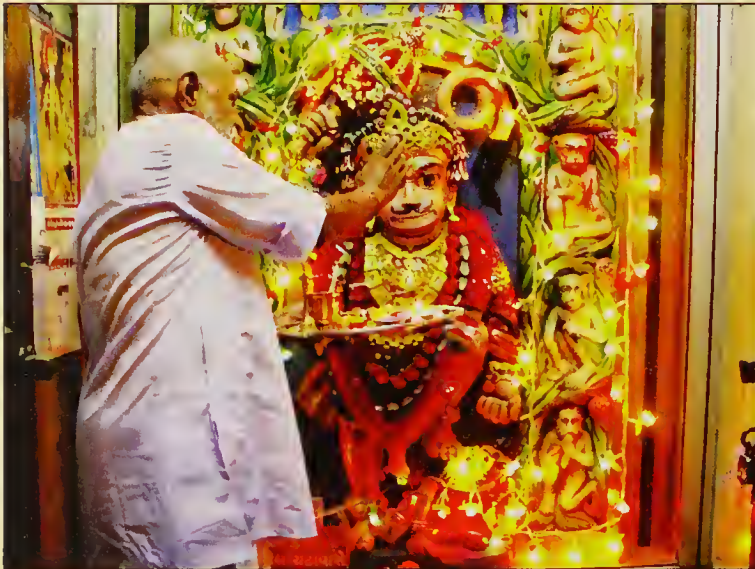
Lakshmi puja

Kāli Chaudash



cow puja

Diwāli



Hanumān puja



lighting divās (diyās) at evening



chopadā puja at evening





Deepdān — lighting diyās in the Dwārkādhish mandir, Mathurā



A family designing rangoli in the morning on Diwāli



*Diwāli lighting,
BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Amdavad*





14. Mahā Kumbha Melā

(Grand pitcher gathering)

- Origin
- Glory
- Ardh Kumbha Melā

In terms of sheer religious fervour, faith and participation, the Mahā Kumbha Melā is the greatest spiritual phenomenon in the world. It is celebrated every 12 years on Mauni Amāvasyā, in Haridwār, Prayagrāj (Allahabad), Ujjain and Nāsik, depending on particular astronomical combinations. The 42-day Kumbha Melā 2001, from 9th Jan to 21st February in Prayāgrāj was at the confluence of three sacred rivers; Gangā, Yamunā and the underground Sarasvati, known as *Triveni Sangam*.

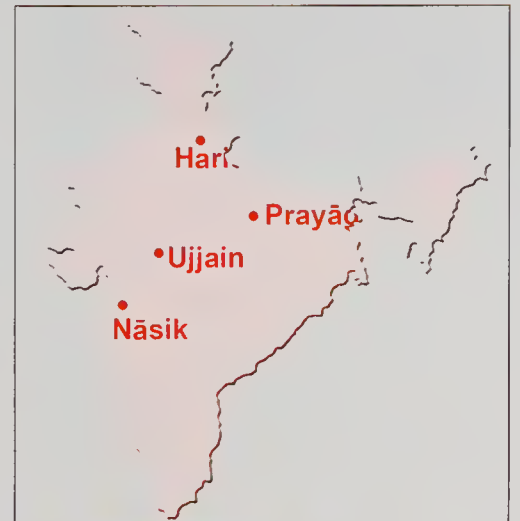
In 2001, 70 million pilgrims from all over the world, including the largest gathering of Hindu ascetics, converged here for ritual bathing, to purify themselves. On 24th January, 30 million bathed in the Sangam.

Origin

The Garud Purāna (I.240.26-28) and other Hindu texts cite the story of the Kumbha (pitcher):

Once the sage Durvāsā visited Indra in Amrāvati, the capital of his abode. He honoured Indra with a garland of ‘never-wilting’ flowers. Indra passed it to *Airāvat*, his seven-trunked elephant, who crushed it under his feet. Offended, the

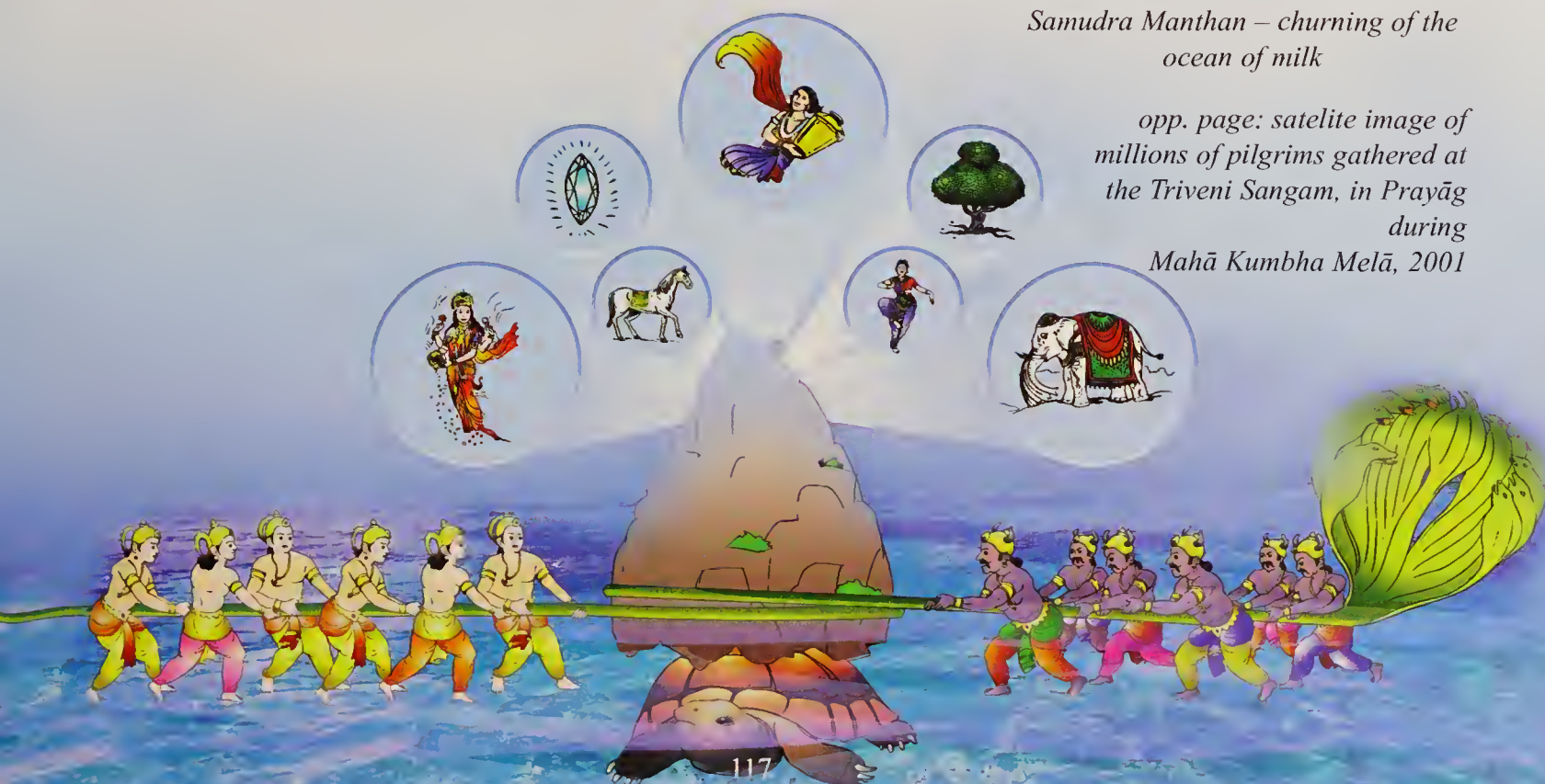
महा कुंभ मेला



Bhagwān Dhanvantari

Samudra Manthan – churning of the ocean of milk

opp. page: satellite image of millions of pilgrims gathered at the Triveni Sangam, in Prayāgrāj during Mahā Kumbha Melā, 2001





tent city for sadhus at the Ardh
Kumbha Melā, Prayāg, 2007

The Kumbha melā has gained international fame as “the world’s most massive act of faith”, and “the world’s greatest religious ritual”.

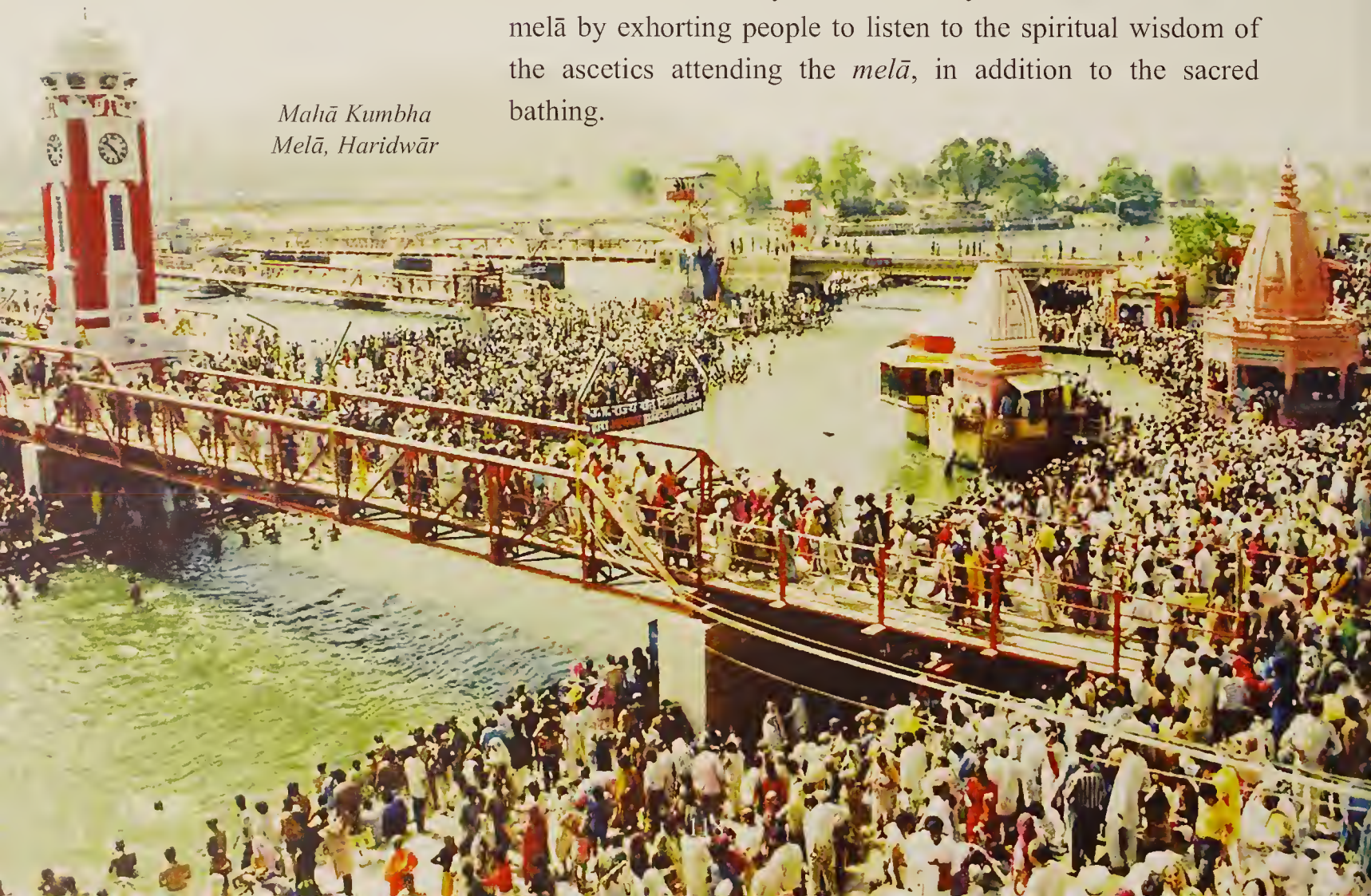
In the 1989 Kumbha Melā, the Guinness Book of World Records proclaimed the 15-million crowd on February 6, at Prayāg, as “the largest-ever gathering of human beings for a single purpose.”

enraged Durvāsā cursed Indra, stripping him of all his wealth and possessions. This weakened the devas. Shri Vishnu, the sustainer of the universe, advised Indra to procure Amrut, the divine nectar, to regain power. To procure this from the depth of the ocean, the *devas* and *dānavas* (demons), though arch enemies, united. Thus ensued the Samudra Manthan, churning of the ocean of milk. From this sprung forth 14 *ratnas* (gems). One of them was Shri Vishnu in the form of Bhagwān Dhanvantari – the divine healer – with a pot of *amrut*. Both the devas and demons scrambled for this kumbha. However, Dhanvantari passed it on to Garud, Vishnu’s celestial vehicle, to take it to Swarg (heaven). In hot pursuit, the demons arrested Garud’s flight forcing it to place the kumbha down in four places: Prayāgrāj, Haridwār, Ujjain and Nāsik.

The *amrut* that spilled in these places sanctified them eternally. The flight spanned 12 days, equivalent to 12 human years. Hence the Mahā Kumbha is celebrated every 12 years. However it is celebrated every four years in rotation at Haridwār, Prayāg, Nāsik and Ujjain, according to the position of Jupiter in the zodiac. Ardh Kumbha is celebrated every six years at Haridwār and Prayāg (see below).

In the 8th century, Shankarāchārya boosted the Kumbha melā by exhorting people to listen to the spiritual wisdom of the ascetics attending the *melā*, in addition to the sacred bathing.

Mahā Kumbha
Melā, Haridwār



Glory

The *punya* gained by bathing at Prayagrāj during the month of Māgh is described in the Mahābhārat as being equivalent to that obtained by fasting for 100 years. This is known as *Kalpvās*. It is also believed that by bathing once during the *Kumbha parva* (period), the *punya* gained is equivalent to bathing a thousand times in the month of Kārtik, hundred times in Māgh and a million times in Vaishākh, in the river Narmadā.

Ardh Kumbha Melā

Ardh means half. Therefore this occurs every six years, half (*ardh*) the period of the Mahā Kumbha Melā, celebrated either in Prayāg or Haridwār. In 2007, it took place in Prayāg for 42 days, from January 3 to February 16.

Sentiments & Rituals

The most important ritual for pilgrims is the sacred bathing in the holy rivers to be cleansed of their *pāp* karmas (sins). They also perform other rituals such as *mundan* (tonsure), *shrāddh*, offer *pujā* to the holy river Deities and listening to the *kathās* of the various ascetic *akhārās* (sects).



bathing ritual in the river Godāvari, Nāsik



pilgrims performing puja with flowers and diyā at the Sangam

The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang, who resided in India from 629 to 645 CE, wrote that King Harshavardhan attended, on every fifth year of his reign, a month-long, "ageless festival" at Prayāg that attracted up to half a million people from all walks of life, when India had 60 million people.

In 1792 CE, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan renounced home in Ayodhyā at the age of 11 years, to embark on his Kalyān Yātrā throughout India. On his way to the sacred shrines in the Himalayas, when he arrived in Haridwār, a Kumbha melā was in progress.

The *mauni Anāvasyā* is a special auspicious day, when the sun, moon, Venus and Mercury are in the zodiac of Capricorn, a rare alignment of planets. *Mauni* means silent. *Amās* is the darkest (moonless) night of the Indian lunar month. Pilgrims observe silence until they bathe, believing that it will accrue *punya* of having performed millions of yagnas.



mundan (tonsure) at the melā, as part of the pilgrimage



15. Yagna (Ritual of the sacred fire)

- Meaning & sentiments
- Yagna ritual
- Types of yagnas and their meanings
- Foremost sentiment of yagna
- Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and yagnas

Meaning & sentiments

The word *yagna* is derived from the Sanskrit root *yaj*, meaning to give (*dān*), to unify (*sangatikaran*) and to perform *Devapujā*.

A *yagna* is one of the oldest rituals in Sanātān Dharma, to propitiate the deities. *Yagna* encompasses the attributes of welcoming (*satkār*), altruism (*upkār*) and unity (*sangathan*). Its foremost meaning is “to give.”

The concept of a *yagna* can be seen working in nature, especially in the food chain, and the oxygen and water cycles of the earth’s ecosystem. Shri Krishna describes this as *yagna chakra*:

All living creatures (bhutas) live on food, which is produced by the help of rain. Rain results from performing yagna. A yagna springs forth from karma and karma has been advocated in the Vedas. The Vedas originated from Paramātmā.

Gitā (3-14,15,16)

Each step renounces (*tyāg*) something to produce the next step. This is the *yagna bhāvnā* of the Gitā. If any step becomes weak, or fail altogether, then the whole cycle breaks down. Each step’s success relies on the *bhāvnā* of the preceding step. The rishis recognised the workings of the whole universe as one gigantic *yagna*, since everything was so intricately inter-related.

In ancient times people performed *yagnas* for the fulfilment of mundane desires (*kāmya yagnas*) such as: abundance of food (*raja*), wealth (*prasava*), light of knowledge (*gyoti*), bodily vigour (*ojas*), longevity (*dirghāyu*), efficiency in work (*prayati*), happiness (*sharmā*), fearlessness (*abhaya*), friendliness (*anamitram*) and sound sleep (*sukham shayanam*) (Krishna Yajur Veda Samhitā – Ch. 18,1,2, and 6). This also involved animal offerings (*bali*). From these

यज्ञ

Yagno vai Vishnuhu – Yagna is Paramātmā’s form. Yagna is Sanātān Dharma’s oldest form of sādhanā.

a blood donation camp is also regarded as a yagna



blood donation yagna during Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami’s Bicentenary, Amdavad, 1985



blood donation yagna held by BAPS in Amdavad, for Gujarat earthquake victims, 2001

opp. page: Pramukh Swami Mahārāj blessing the Vishwa Shānti Yagna held on 5th Feb. 2003 during Prāna Pratishthā of the BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, New Delhi



Vishnu Mahāyāg in Bhuj, for victims of the earthquake (7/2/2001)



havan padi – used in yagna fire, mixture of: guggal, dashāng dhup, kapur kāchali, kesudo, powdered bili, twigs of 7 trees; khākharo, banyan, mango, umbaro, aghedo, ark & palāsh



Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, abolishing animal offerings in the Jetalpur yagna (see p.127)

In South India, the wood of the jackfruit tree is considered sacred for offering in the yagna fire (see photo p.186).

offerings arose flesh-eating. The brahmin pundits considered this as *prasād* – sanctified food. The whole concept of sacrificing animals – *Bali*, arose from deliberate misinterpretations by pundits of the injunctions prescribed in the *shāstras*. They manipulated the meaning of *Ajena*. In Sanskrit *aja* means barley, as well as a goat. Instead of using barley, pundits started sacrificing goats.

Ajena yajeta

– perform a *yagna* using barley.

The Mahābhārat supports this:

“*Yagna* should be performed with seeds – this is the Vedic tradition. *Aja* is a type of seed. Therefore it is not proper to slaughter he-goats. Wherever there is animal slaughter in the *yagnas*, that is not the way of righteous men” (Shānti Parva 337.4-5, 324.4-5).

The Vedas proclaim:

Mā himsyāt sarvāni bhutāni.

– do not kill any living creature.

In early 19th century Gujarat, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan vehemently denounced animal sacrifices and introduced non-violent (*ahimsak*) *yagnas*. He performed many such *yagnas* during the early years of His ministry, by inviting thousands of Brahmin pundits from all over the land, enjoining them to perform only *ahimsak yagnas*.

Yagna ritual

Yagna is itself regarded as a *deva* in Yajur Veda (16.1.31).

Yagna as a rite is defined as offering oblations in the name of *devas* – *devatoddeshena havis-tyāgah* – while specific *mantras* are being chanted. The Jaiminiya sutra (4.2.27) explains that it is an act of giving up of articles to please the *devas* – *devatoddeshyakadravya-tyāga-rupa-kriyā*. The important rite in a *yagna* is offering oblations into the fire – *havin-prakshepātmaka vyāpārah*.

Yagna eradicates all sins and purifies the performer of the *yagna*. It bestows strength and vigour in him by sanctifying the food he eats and the water he drinks (Yajur Veda 1, 20). It induces health and happiness and increases wealth.



pundit offering ghee using the
agnihotra havani



Yagnas are also commonly performed during Hindu marriage rites, with the Agni deity acting as a witness to the marriage vows (see *Vivāh samskāras* pp.309-310).

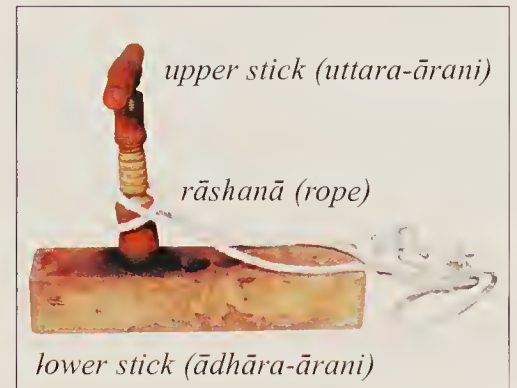
The presiding deva – *yagnasya devam* – of the yagna is *Agni* as cited in Rig Veda's first mantra. *Agni* readily secures the welfare of all – *puro-hitam*.

The platform for performing the *yagna* fire is known as *vedi*. The pit into which the oblations are offered is known as *kund*. The wood that is used as faggots (*samidh*) is obtained from specified trees only, from: *ashvattha* (*Ficus religiosa*), *palāsh* (*Butea frondosa*) *khadira* (*Acacia catechu*), *nyagrodha* (*Ficus indica*) and *shami* (*Prosopis specigera*). The shami tree is spiritually significant, regarded as *agni-garbha* – 'mother of fire'. The ladle to pour ghee into the fire is known as *Agnihotra-havani*, made of *vaikankata* wood (*Flacourtia sapida*).

The person who sponsors the yagna is known as *yajamān*. The chief brahmin conducting the rites is known as *hotru* or *adhvaryu*. He may be helped by another pundit who chants *stotras*. He is known as *prati-prasthātru* or *udgātru*.

Traditional method of kindling the yagna fire

To kindle the sacred fire of a yagna, the method prescribed in the Vedas is to rub two *arani* sticks of the *ashvattha* tree against each other, with a rope known as *rāshanā*. This rite is known as *agnyādhana* or *agnyādheya* (see diagram). The yagna fire is stoked with a wooden *upavesha* made of *udumbara* wood (*Ficus glomerata*), the head of which is shaped like an extended palm.

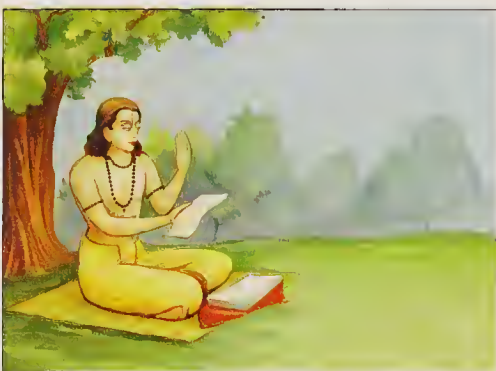


pundits kindling the yagna fire in the
traditional manner as enjoined in
the Vedas



wooden ladle (saravo) used in a yagna by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan to pour ghee (Abhishek Mandapam, BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Amdavad)

A copper plate inscription excavated in Mysore, cites that King Janmejaya, son of Parikshit rājā, performed a Sarpa (serpent) yagna, to appease Naagdevata, since Parikshit was bitten by Takshak Nāg. Parikshit was Abhimanyu's son and Arjuna's grandson. This inscription is also an indirect testimony of the Mahābhārat war.



rishi yagna

Famous yagnas

- In Daksh Prajāpati's yagna, her daughter Sati, consort of Shiva, immolated herself. On this place today there is mandir known as Bilkeshwar Mahādeva in Kankhal, Haridwār (see photo p.55).

- King Dashrath, Bhagwān Rāmachandra's father, performed a *Putreshti yagna* for begetting sons, under Shrungi rishi's guidance. Shri Rāma performed an Ashwamedh yagna, at the end of which, his two sons Lav and Kush tied the yagna's horse. Draupadi was born through a yagna. After the Mahābhārat war, Shri Krishna advised the Pāndavas to perform a *Rājsuya yagna*. *Parjanya yagna* was and is performed during drought to propitiate the devas, to grace rain.

Types of yagnas and their meanings

Today people perform: Rudrayāg to propitiate Shiva, Vishnuyāg to propitiate Vishnu, Lakshmihom – for prosperity, Gāyatriyāg, Ganeshyāg, Vāstuyāg – before moving into a new house (see p.186) and Lagnayāg – marriage yagna (see p.309).

For householders the shāstras enjoin the *Panch mahā yagnas*: (1) *Brāhma Yagna* (2) *Pitru Yagna* (3) *Deva Yagna* (4) *Bhuta Yagna* (5) *Manushya Yagna* (Garud Purāna 115, Manu Smruti 3/70).

The supreme yagna according to the Gitā (10/25) is:

Yagnānām japayagnosmi

– of all the yagnas, I am Japa yagna.

As we saw earlier in Ch. 3, *japa* is the repeated chanting of Paramātmā's name. It is also the simplest form of a yagna, without any elaborate ritual.

1. *Brāhma Yagna* : Man harbours more desires than he has time to fulfil. He hankers after the ephemeral pleasures of wealth, power, and self-indulgence which all lead to pain and misery. Many people who reach the acme in their respective fields, have often experienced discontentment, as did Michelangelo at the age of 90, or Ernest Hemingway, who committed suicide. There is only unhappiness at the end of the road of materialism. Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami enjoins becoming *Akshar-rup*, as the true goal of life and then to worship Purushottam. For this, the shāstras advocate *kathā*

and bhakti. This is also known as *Yog yagna*. There is bliss and contentment in listening to and extolling the divine episodes of Paramātmā and His Sadhu.

Brāhma Yagna, also known as *jnān* (knowledge) *yagna*, represents surrendering everything that the mind desires, to the guru; to live solely according to the guru's wishes.

The Yajur Veda (34/1-6) also states:

Tanme manaha shivasankalpamastu

– let my mind have redemptive thoughts.

Imbibing such noble thoughts is also *Brāhma yagna*.

To offer and renounce the body's awareness of 'I' and 'mine' at the guru's lotus feet is also *Brāhma yagna*.

2. *Pitru Yagna* : *Pitru* means parents, ancestors.

Since we owe a great debt to our parents, we should serve them to the best of our ability, till their last breath.

One who does not serve or obey one's parents, invites the displeasure of Paramātmā and self degradation.

Pitru yagna means sincerely serving one's parents, as well as making offerings in a *yagna* for one's ancestors,

3. *Deva Yagna* : Life on earth functions smoothly because of deities such as: Varuna – of water, Indra – of rain, Ravi – sun and Chandra – moon.

Anything offered to these deities in a *yagna*, is returned a thousand-fold. *Yagna* means 'to give'. Whenever we give, we are performing a *yagna*. In return, the deities are appeased and they also give in return. Therefore they are also performing a *yagna*. This is cited in Rig Veda's (10.110) Purush Sukta:

Yagnena yagnamayajanta devāhā.

– perform a *yagna* with a *yagna*.

The devas offered themselves to the *yagna* fire. From this primordial *yagna*, formed the first principles of life – *tāni dharmāni prathamānyāsana*. However since man does not perform a *yagna*, in destroying forests, polluting air and water, slaughtering animals for food, the result can only be drought, famine, disease and overall misery. With profound insight, the rishis prescribed injunctions which naturally maintained a stable equilibrium in the Earth's ecosystem.

4. *Bhuta Yagna* : *Bhuta* means life form. Every living organism on Earth has a unique contribution to make in the ongoing universal *yagna* of life. It has its own niche in this intricate network. Therefore all the *bhutas* are inter-linked.



pitru yagna



deva yagna



bhuta yagna

Man's existence then is inherently dependent on the other *bhutas* and so he cannot afford to destroy or upset this delicate yet dynamic equilibrium.

Has man been able to invent a machine whose input is grass and output milk?

Has he devised a machine which takes in carbon-dioxide and water to give oxygen and energy?

These two examples illustrate the great debt of *bhutas* on our lives. So it behoves upon us to conserve and look after life. This is *Bhuta yagna*. Killing cattle and other animals for food is anathema to the *yagna bhāvnā* of Sanātan Dharma.

Today, despite his age, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj unflaggingly travels worldwide, performing *Bhuta yagna*; propagating *ahimsā* and a vegetarian diet regimen.

5. *Manushya Yagna* : *Manushya* means man. Due to his cruelty and other base instincts, the *shāstras* remind him:

Manurbhava

– *Mam Smriti*

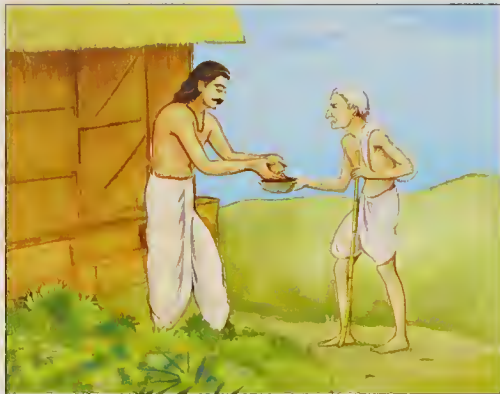
– O man! Become human.

Hence the true sentiment of the *Manushya yagna*, is to remove the base instincts of anger, violence, cruelty, greed, hate, and other instincts from man, to make him a human.

Foremost sentiment of yagna

While performing the *yagna* ritual itself, the officiating pundit requests the devotee offering *ahuti* – *pujā* materials to the deity, to utter *idam na mama* (इदम न मम), meaning this is not mine (it is Your's). Here then lies the significant import of *yagna*. When the possessive *mama* (मम) meaning mine is eradicated, *ahamkār* – ego too is destroyed. Therefore Sanātan Dharma's lofty *yagna bhāvnā* exhorts that man should forsake his self-centredness, by offering himself in the service of others.

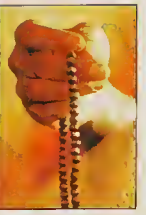
Pramukh Swami Mahārāj has lived this ideal all his life. He has uplifted man from the depths of degradation onto the heights of ideal *bhaktas*. He has been performing the true *Manushya yagna*, sacrificing body, mind and *ātmā* in the service of mankind. He lives not for himself but to give. Each second of his life is a *yagna*. Swamiji has truly imbibed the ultimate *yagna* – *ātmanivedanam*, sacrificing his *ātmā* to Paramātmā and mankind. He is also the living embodiment of the five types of *yagnas*.



manushya yagna



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj, on his way to visit a young boy in a coma in a hospital in Surat (1999)



Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and yagnas

Early during his efforts to establish Ekāntik Dharma, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan performed *yagnas* on a massive scale, known as *Mahā Rudra* and *Vishnu Yāg*, on several historical occasions.

He held a 40-day *Mahā Rudra* in Kāriyāni (Saurashtra) in 1809. He held both a *Mahā Rudra* and *Vishnu Yāg* for 18 days beginning on Makar Sankrānti of 1809 in Jetalpur, near Amdavad. Later that year, on Posh *sud* Purnimā, He held a special yagna in Dabhān (near Khedā), to initiate Mulji Sharmā as Gunātītānand Swami, the manifest form of Aksharbrahman.

Through these *yagnas*, he wished to re-establish *ahimsac yagnas* and abolish the prevailing *himsac yagnas*, which involved animal offerings. He invited thousands of brahmin pundits (*hotris*) from all over India, from as far as Kāshi and Kashmir. During the Jetalpur *yagna*, he let the *hotris* erudite in the Vedas, to debate with Bansidhar, a Shakti Panth follower. He practiced and falsely propounded *himsac yagnas* as being Vedic. The *hotris* unanimously declared to the thousands present, that the Vedas enjoined Bhagwān's *pujā* in *yagnas* using auspicious *dravyas* such as kumkum, sandalwood paste, saffron, rice, barley, coconut, ghee, sesame seeds and *bhog* (food) made from grains. Similarly, *pujā* of Bhagwān's various Shakti forms, namely Lakshmi, Saraswati and Pārvati, also involved the same *dravyas* as for Bhagwān. Those pundits who offered animals were to be considered degraded and non-brahmins (Dave 2003 II: 420-429).

These *yagnas* inspired the *hotris* present to practice and propound non-violent *yagnas* in their home regions. Moreover, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan effectively induced an awareness in the people who attended, of the validity of *ahimsac yagnas* being Vedic, which gradually phased out animal offerings in Gujarat.

Yagnas in the BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya

In the past 25 years, from 1981 to 2006, BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā has performed Mahayagnas (with a total of 11,120 kunds), participated by 33,975 yajmān couples.

In 1995, during Pramukh Swami Mahārāj's Amrut Mahotsav in Mumbai, a Chāturmāsyeshti Shrautyāg was performed, as stipulated in the Vedas, thus perpetuating a great Vedic paramparā.

(Source: Swāminārāyan Prakāsh, April 2007:23).



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj at the sacred yagna kund in 1810 CE, Dabhān, Gujarat



shrine on sacred site of yagnashala where Bhagwān Swāminārāyan performed yagna in 1808 CE, in Jetalpur, nr. Amdavad



16. Dān (Donation)



दान

- Glory in the shāstras.
- Purpose of dān
- Types of dān
- Donor's sentiments
- To whom should one donate?
- Spiritual injunctions
- Foremost sentiment

The rishis have enjoined factors known as *vidhi* (do's) and *nishedh* (don'ts) for man (*jivas*), which sets him apart from animals. They have stipulated 20 such parameters, 10 of *nishedh* and 10 of *vidhi*, whose observance leads an individual to be termed human. *Dān* meaning to give, is one of the *vidheya* parameters, considered as one of the most vital – *mahaprāna*, of all humane values.

Supporting this, the Mahābhārat exhorts man never to forsake the six virtues: truth, donation, activity, non-envy, forgiveness and patience:

*Shadava tu gunāhā pumsam na hātavyaha kadāchana,
satyam dānam anālasyam anasuyā kshamā dhrutihi.*

– Udyog Parva 33/81

Glory in the shāstras

As well as being Sanātan Dharma's eternal tradition, the shāstras extol *dān*'s glory:

- The Rig Veda says that in donating food or money, it never decreases. On the contrary, it increases and one who does not donate, experiences misery; his own wealth becomes discordant.

- The Atharva Veda (3/24/5/) exhorts:

Shatahastam samāhara sahasrahastam sankira.

– acquire (wealth) with a hundred hands and give away with a thousand.

- The Isha Upanishad's first shloka advises:

*Ishāvāsyamidam sarvam yatkincha jagatyām jagat,
tena tyaktena bhunjithā mā grudhaha kasya sviddhanam*

– all this that moves in this moving world is pervaded by Paramātmā. You may enjoy this by renouncing it (after offering it to Paramātmā). Do not covet that wealth which belongs to others.

opp. page: offering alms to BAPS
sadhus on Makar Sankrānti,
Banaskantha, north Gujarat

In essence, the Upanishad proclaims that the whole Creation is a form of Paramātmā, and He resides in it. So we should use everything within it as His *prasād* – grace, by dedicating to Him.

The Manu Smruti (1/86) says:

dānamekam kalau yuge

– charity alone is the highest virtue in Kaliyug.

Purpose of dān

The Dharma Shāstras cite three important reasons for *dān*. The foremost is to purify one's wealth. Of all types of purity, they uphold purity of wealth as the foremost. One's wealth – *Lakshmi* may arrive by various means. If that Lakshmi has been procured by evil means, then it will drag away all one's savings too. This can be in the form of: medical bills, theft, thrifty family members, addiction, tax raids, bankruptcy and gambling.

The Chānakyaniti Sutras (76) echo this injunction:

Artha toshinam shreehi parityajati

– one who procures wealth unethically and does not donate, will lose “Shree,” meaning Lakshmi, wealth, honour and mundane happiness.

This is aptly reflected in a colloquial Hindi maxim: *Khudāki lāthiko āwāz nahi hai* – Paramātmā's cane (of punishment) has no sound!

If one has observed purity of wealth, then such detrimental consequences do not arise. Paramātmā Himself sees to that.

The second important purpose underlying *dān* is cited by the Manu Smruti (3/68). It reveals that the male *gruhasth* is polluted everyday by *panchsuna* – five potential sources of sins in the home: stove, grinding stone (flour mill), (cleaning) brush, pestle and mortar and water pot. To be delivered from these sins, Manu (3/68-71) enjoins him to perform five *yagnas* everyday: *Brāhma*, *Pitru*, *Deva*, *Bhuta* and *Nru* (see Ch.15). However, since this is practically difficult, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan enjoins a simple alternative in the *Shikshāpatri* (147); to donate 1/10th or 1/20th of one's income to Paramātmā, wherein all the five *yagnas* are incorporated.

Thirdly, it is incumbent for an individual to donate from that earned by sweat and intelligence, since part of it belongs

Background image:
copper plates of Karnadeva I,
Solanki King of Gujarat.
Ladol. Script: Nagari – V.S.
1140 (1084 BCE), language:
Sanskrit.
Record of donation of land by
Karnadeva to brahmins.
Courtesy: B. J. Institute
Museum, Amdavad.



to Bhagwān. The underlying reason is that during the process of earning, various divine factors have aided the individual. If one donates to a good or evil person, one receives benevolent or malevolent fruits, respectively.

However, by donating to Paramātmā, or in accordance to the wishes of the Satpurush, an individual receives not material merit, but *punya*, which helps him towards moksha. Therefore in reality, a true devotee firmly believes that the Satpurush accepts *dān* in order to give back infinitely more.

These sentiments are expounded in the Bhāgvatam (10.74.24):

|| *Deyam shāntāyā purnāya dattasya - antyamichchhatā.* ||

– he who wishes for infinite return should donate to Paramātmā, who is pure, peaceful and the ātmā of all creatures.

Therefore the devas enjoin:

|| *Dehi mey, dadāmi tey.* ||

– give me, so I can give you.

This is exemplified by Surya Deva, who takes water, in order to give back a thousandfold in the form of rain:

|| *Sahasragunam utsrushtum ādatte hi rasam ravihi.* ||

Types of dān

These can be placed into two categories:

(A) Five types:

Abhaydān : Granting moksha – eradicating the cycle of rebirth. Lasts for eternity, therefore is the highest form, only graced by Paramātmā and the Satpurush (see p.132).

Vidyadān : Imparting knowledge e.g. teaching, ceases with the person's death.

Bhumidān : land, for building schools, clinics, *dharmashālās*, mandirs. This survives till the building survives.

Annadān : food, grain, fodder (see pp.133, 136).

Dravyadān : wealth – three types:

- *Shubh Lakshmi* (auspicious) : used in home.
- *Āsuri Lakshmi* (evil) : obtained unethically e.g.

One of the oldest source of evidence of Dān in ancient times, is on a copper plate inscription, excavated in Mysore. The inscription cites that King Janmejaya, son of Parikshit rājā, performed a Sarpa (serpent) yagna, after which he donated ten villages to the yagna's purohits (see also margin on p.124).

gambling, lottery, etc. (see also *swatwa dosh* of diet p.348).

- *Mahā Lakshmi* (holy) : used for *dān*.

(B) Three types:

Rājasic : given with mundane expectation of something in return e.g. fame, recognition or from Paramātmā to improve one's lot. Also includes that given dishearteningly, and to an evil person.

Tāmasic: given with malice and in bad circumstances.

Sāttvic : the best form, given eagerly, without expectation of returns, to persons fit to be donated (*supātra*), at the right time and place (Gitā 17/20-22).

- The supreme *dān* is *Abhaydān*, offered by Paramātmā or the Satpurush. This is freedom from rebirth and he graces the *jivas* Akshardhām, Bhagwān Purushottam's divine abode.
- One important *dān* in addition to those above is *samskāradān*. All *shikharbaddh* and Hari mandirs of the BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya conduct spiritual activities – the foremost being *kathā* – which imparts samskāras to individuals of all ages, while *gruhashth* devotees give *dān* in cash for the building and maintenance of these mandirs. In return, they receive spiritual wisdom.
- The greatest *dān* that *gruhashths* in the sampradāya give, is to offer their most beloved sons at the lotus feet of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and Pramukh Swami Mahārāj, to become sadhus. In the Vachanāmrut (Gadhadā I-75), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan reveals that by becoming a sadhu, the individual automatically redeems 101* generations in his lineage, in addition to the thousands to whom he will impart samskāras during his life. Simultaneously, the parents also entertain sentiments of being graced; of being chosen by Paramātmā, who gifted them a son to be raised for sadhuhood. Therein the added benefit to the parents, is that they are freed of *ahamkār* – the pride of I and mine, which acts as the fly in



Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's left palm in abhaymudrā symbolises abhaydān on devotees

* Fifty generations of his predecessors, fifty generations of his present family members, plus the family itself).

the ointment of true *dān*. True *dān* is discussed later, in the concluding remarks.

- During His time, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan exhorted devotees to offer ‘*dān* of time’, known in the sampradāya as *āwardāno dharmādo*. This involved sparing time, usually one month annually, to listen to Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami’s *kathā* in Junāgadh and offer *sevā* in the mandir. This tradition prevails even today, in a slightly varied manner. Devotees either visit the mandirs in India annually or offer *sevā* in their nearest mandir / satsang centre on weekends.

Donor’s sentiments

The Taittiriya Upanishad (1.11.3) enjoins the donor to entertain the following sentiments:

Shraddhayā deyam, ashaddhayā adeyam, shriyā deyam, hriyā deyam, bhiyā deyam, samvidā deyam:

– give faithfully, do not give unfaithfully, give magnanimously, give noble-heartedly, give by respecting the *shāstras*, donate thoughtfully.

Additionally, the *shāstras* enjoin the donor to entertain the following three sentiments: (i) to believe one’s great fortune in being able to donate, (ii) to keep it secret – ‘the left hand does not know what the right hand gives’ – is a well-known Hindu maxim, and (iii) to have no expectations, either from society or Paramātmā – for fame, prosperity or good health. This reflects Shri Krishna’s injunction in the *Gītā* (2/47), to do karma without expectation of its fruits.

This is better appreciated when we consider the infinite grace on mankind by Paramātmā Himself, such as: air, sunlight, benevolent effects of the moon, food, water, rain, herbs, breathtaking vistas, rich mineral deposits, diamonds, gold and so forth. Yet we never come across the sign, ‘Made by BHAGWĀN.’ Whereas it is man’s shortcoming that he insists on having his name etched on donation plates; more so in holy shrines and *tirths*, the very places where he should bow in humility, rather than swagger in false pride.

The *shāstras* reveal the profound consequences of entertaining pride or hailing one’s *dān*. The Mahābhārat says that when a donor utters ‘mine’ or ‘I am giving’, the two letters म् give rise to rebirth – *janma-maran*. Therefore sage



Annadān – offering grain (in a tirth)

advice to the donor is to utter *na*, न before the मन्, meaning ‘this is not mine.’ This results in eternal liberation (Ashwamedhic Parva, 3/1,3).

That *dān* which has not been covert is considered fruitless by Manu (4/237):

|| *Yagno-nrutena ksharati tapaha ksharati vismāyat.*
|| *ayurviprapavadena dānam cha parikirtanāt.* ||

– pride of performing *tapas* (austerities) renders the *tapas* fruitless, maligning a brahmin or *bhakta* shortens one’s longevity and the *dān* made public is rendered fruitless.

However, the latter injunction does not apply if the recipient discloses the *dān*.

To whom should one donate?

Choosing an appropriate recipient when donating is vitally important. This may seem a trifle peculiar. However the Hindu *shāstras* emphatically stipulate this. The reason is that, by donating to an unsuitable person (*kupātra*) the donor may become the recipient of *pāp* (sin) instead of *punya* (merit). For example, the *shāstras* cite the story of a rich merchant donating food to a poor fisherman. The latter sold the food to buy a fishing net. With the net, he killed thousands of fish for the rest of his life. The *pāp* incurred, transferred to the merchant!

Similarly, it is natural for people to be moved on seeing a beggar. However, it would be prudent to examine his background before donating, in case he turns out to be a gambler, alcoholic or drug abuser. Therefore the *dān* enjoined by the Satpurush rather than by one’s wish becomes *nirgun*, devoid of *māyic* impressions, and results in divine fruits.

There are numerous examples in Sanātan Dharma lauding *dān*. The foremost is of King Bali. Though a demon, he worshipped Vishnu. When the latter, as Vāman avatār, requested for three stridefuls of land, he gladly consented. In only two strides, Vāman took all his kingdom. For the third stride Bali offered his head! Pleased with such selfless sacrifice, Vishnu has been obligated to eternally remain at his door. From this act, of giving everything, including himself, arose the superlative term depicting the acme of *dān*, *balidān*. The word *bali* itself has become a synonym for *dān*.



Bali Rājā offering Vāman Bhagwān
3 stridefuls of land.

(image source: Hindu Festivals,
© Swāminārāyan Aksharpith, 2010).



In the Mahābhārat, Shri Krishna praised Karna, as a *mahādāni* – the supreme donor, much to Arjuna's dislike. To demonstrate the truth of this to Arjuna, Shri Krishna once requested Yudhisthira and the other Pāndavas for some sandalwood to cook food. Since their sandalwood logs were wet, the Pāndavas refused. Shri Krishna then approached Karna. His logs too were soaked by rain. However, without second thoughts, he smashed his exquisitely carved sandalwood door and gave the wood to Shri Krishna.

Draupadi's timely service in bandaging Shri Krishna's bleeding finger, with a strip torn from her sari, has been praised in many bhajans and glorified over the ages. When Duhshāsan humiliated her in public by pulling her sārī, Shri Krishna aided her by miraculously providing rolls of saris.

Sudāmā, Shri Krishna's poverty-stricken childhood companion, only gifted him a handful of raw rice grains with a pure heart. Shri Krishna instantly reciprocated, by providing him a huge palace. This echoes his promise in the Gitā (9/22), that he who gifts Paramātmā everything and constantly thinks of Him, shall be cared for in every way by Him: *yogakshemam vahāmyaham*.

When Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, as Neelkanth Varni, arrived in Bhatwadar, Saurashtra, a five-year-old girl affectionately offered Him milk and *rotlo*. Pleased with her sentiments, He blessed her; that He would make her a *rani* (queen). Years later, He arranged her marriage with Dādā Khāchar, the Kāthi king of Gadhadā. During the Jetalpur yagna, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan eagerly accepted and relished a half-cooked rotlo made of *math* – a low species of pulse, offered by Jivan bhakta, a poverty-stricken devotee.

During the mid-19th century, a Muslim woodcutters's young son, Bauddin gifted a bundle of firewood to Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami, who wished to warm himself one chilly winter's night in the forest. The Swami's blessings later transformed the pauper into a *Diwān* (chief minister), of the Nawāb of Junāgadh. Two business partners named Māwā and Musā, ruined to destitution, devotionally gave a handful of *mamrā* (inflated rice) to Gunātītānand Swami. Soon their business revived. Today, Māwābhai's



Shri Krishna's aid to Draupadi

descendants continue their flourishing business in Leicester, England.

Hence the *pātra* (recipient), is crucially important in *dān*; the ideal being Paramātmā or the Satpurush.

Spiritual injunctions

One-tenth of one's wealth earned honestly, should be used for some religious cause to please Paramātmā (Skand Purāna Ha. K. 12/32).

The Yāgnavalkya Smṛuti (201) advocates *dān* such as: cow, land, sesame seed and grains, and gold to a deserving person (*supātra*):

Go-bhu-til-hiranyādi pātre dātavyamarchitam.

The Bhāgvatam (8/19/37) enjoins an individual to divide his wealth into five parts and donate one part for dharma:

Panchadhā vibhājan vittamihamutra cha modate

The *Dānmayukh* also advocates division of income into five parts. However it enjoins using three parts for one's sustenance and two parts (40%) for dharma!

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan is more lenient. In the Shikshāpatri (147), He exhorts devotees to donate *dashāmnsh* (one-tenth) and for those who are very poor, one-twentieth.

In India generally, a ritual of *dān* is associated with all aspects of life. However, one festival is specially ear-marked for *dān*, *Makar Sankrānti* (January 14), also known as *Uttarāyan* (see p.106). On this day, people reverently donate grain or money to the poor and ascetics, and fodder to cattle. The underlying *bhāvnā* is to become less self-centred and more *vyāpak* – noble-hearted, like Paramātmā.

Another Hindu tradition and decorum, is to offer *dān* in the form of money or foodstuffs when visiting a mandir, guru or *tirth* (sacred place). In the mandir, when 'taking' *āskā* after *ārti*, devotees also ritually place some money in the *ārti* plate or *dān* box, feeling graced. In the *tirth*, the shāstras enjoin pilgrims not to have food given as *dān*, since this nullifies the *punya* accrued by the pilgrimage. They advocate eating food from one's own finance (Shikshāpatri 151). However Bhagwān Swāminārāyan established a tradition in the Swāminārāyan mandirs to give *annadān* – food, to the needy (Shikshāpatri 131) and *vidyādān* – educational facilities for the poor (Shikshāpatri 132).

He further points out in the Vachanāmṛut (Gadhadā I-34), that whatever *duhkha* – misery and discord that devotees then experience, is due to laxity in observing His injunctions.



offering grass to cattle during Makar Sankrānti



BAPS's hostel for 150 Ādivasi children in Ukai, south Gujarat



He also enjoins them to offer *dān* after an eclipse (Shikshāpatri 87) and to brahmins during festivals (Shikshāpatri 156). He has even thought of widows, instructing them not to donate for dharma if their savings are only sufficient for their sustenance (Shikshāpatri 167).

An eternal and ennobling ritual of Sanātān Dharma, *dān* has been highly venerated and devotionally imbibed over the ages. Whether individuals offer *dān* for purity of wealth, the good of others, and *pitrus* for moksha, it is the underlying sentiments rather than the nature of the *dān*, that is important. Hearteningly, Shri Krishna proclaims in the Gitā (9.26), that he eagerly accepts anything offered lovingly, even leaves. Therein he offers a light at the end of the ‘samsāra tunnel’ for everyone, including the poor and sinful, to elevate themselves spiritually, to ‘samskarise’ themselves.

Foremost sentiment

For the novice, this is the primary level of *dān*, of giving physical objects. The true *bhakta* striving on the highest path of sādhanā, considers his every possession as Paramātmā’s and rightfully His. The *bhakta* likens himself merely as an ‘interim,’ a ‘bank cashier,’ while Paramātmā remains the *mālik* – owner. The *bhakta*’s true dharma and bhakti is *ātmanivedanam*, to implicitly offer everything, including his *ātmā* at the lotus-feet of Paramātmā. This is also known as *ananya sharanāgati* – unalloyed refuge at His lotus-feet.

If the *bhakta* thinks even for a moment, that ‘he is donating,’ then this is a great flaw in his devotion, for this boosts his *ahamkār* – ego of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ With ‘I’ insidiously creeping in, *ananya sharanāgati* is marred or even nullified. Therefore the highest and final endeavour is to eradicate the subtlest vestiges of *ahamkār*. This is effected by pleasing the Satpurush. The self purified, he, the pure *ātmā* offers himself at the lotus-feet of Paramātmā. This *ananya sharanāgati* is his true and final *dān*. Final, because transmigration ceases.

Gitā’s Sentiments of Dān

The act of offering is Brahman, the material offered is Brahman, the recipient is Brahman, the donor is Brahman (4/24).



17. Maanta (Personal pledges)

- Maanta
- Forms of maanta
- Types of problems
- Maanta in BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā

Maanta

‘Maanta’ means to pledge or observe a religious vow, as a way of beseeching Bhagwān to alleviate a problem in life, for gaining spiritual merit (*punya*) or until completion of a mundane or religious project.

Forms of maanta

(1) Devotees pledge to visit *tirths* (sacred places and shrines) usually by observing some physical hardship, such as walking (some barefooted), *gabad yātrā* – rolling on the road or doing *dandvats* all the way! During the journey, some observe *ektānā* – having one meal a day, some do *farār* – eating *farāri* foods (see p.431) and some observe a complete fast if the journey takes only a day or two.

Examples of pilgrimages by walking: Ambāji (north Gujarat), Nāthdwārā (Rajasthan), Dākor, Dwarkā, Amarnāth, Vaishno Devi, Kedārnāth, Yamunotri, Kailās-Mānsarovar and Tirupati. Two notable examples concern the latter. Two officials of the East India Company vowed *maanta* of



pilgrims performing puja and ārti of Nāgdevata at the base of 3 trees (banyan, neem, ambli) wishing for offspring (Tirumālā Devasthānam). Neelkanth Varni (Bhagwān Swāminārāyan) stayed under this tree.

मानता

In Guruvāyur, regarded as the second Tirupati and Dwarkā of south India, there is an unusual variation of maanta, in which devotees make an offering in the mandir, of the ‘Krishnanattam.’ This is an eight-day dance drama to fulfill cherished wishes; for offspring, peace between spouses, expedite vivāh, increase crop yield, decrease poverty, etc. (see photo p.77).

(Subramanian 2003:35)

Devotees wishing for offspring stand in the water of the temple tank known as Rudratirtha and recite the Rudragita

(Vaidyanathan 2006:50).

In the sixth month of the Tamil calendar, Purattasi Saturday, devotees of Bhagwān Venkateshwara collect money, rice and food grains. Then they walk up to the Tirumālā temple to pray for fulfillment of their wishes. If they attain it the same day, they walk up the mountain again, with the offerings.

(Ayyar 1998).

opp. page: devotees performing pradakshinā of the sacred Akshar Deri shrine, BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Gondal, Saurashtra

In the Tirumālā mandir in Tirupati, some devotees take a vow to perform a strenuous pradakshinā known as Angapradakshinā. Instead of walking, they roll on the corridor around the temple.



C – Chennai (Madras)

Bhagwān Venkateshwara for their acute, incurable illnesses. After being cured, both visited Tirumālā. One, Sir Thomas Munroe arranged for a daily offering of a 'gangalam' – huge vessel of pongal and gifted the village of Kotavayulu for this purpose. Lord Williams, the second official, instituted the Lord Williams 'chali pandili' – a drinking water facility on pilgrim trek to Tirumālā (Krishna 2004:59).

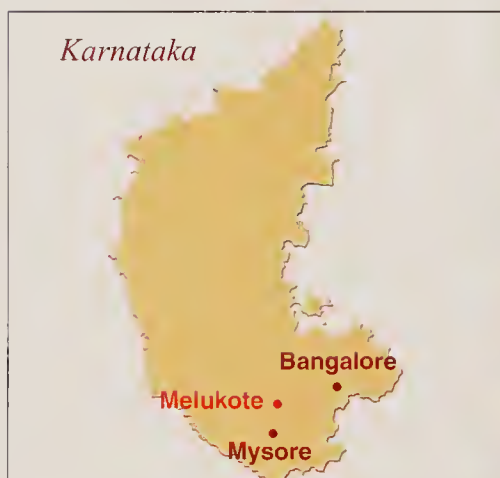
(2) Fasting, as in (1) above. Some may observe avoiding sweets or ghee until their pledge has been fulfilled. Some observe *dhārnā-pārnā* – eating on alternate days only, for one month during Shrāvan or *Chāturmas* (four months of monsoon) or even longer periods.

(3) Offering alms to ascetics and pilgrims in shrines and tirths.

(4) Hanging baby dolls or cots on trees in temples in south India, to wish for offspring.



dolls on Dashmul tree in Janārdana Swamy mandir, Varkalā beach



cots hung in Nrusinh mandir, Melukote, south India by pilgrims wishing for offspring

Types of problems

These include: chronic and painful illnesses, to beget offspring, to overcome poverty, to overcome an undesirable *swabhāva* such as ego, anger, hate, jealousy, greed, taste, etc., to progress in studies or pass an upcoming exam or interview, etc.

Maanta is a self-chosen pledge to offer extra devotion to Bhagwān and please Him and the Satpurush, in return for deliverance from the ups and downs in daily life.

Many pilgrims to Tirumālā take vows of tonsure – shaving their heads after walking 25 km up the hills to the mandir. The underlying sentiment is of *sharanāgati* – total refuge at Bhagwān’s lotus-feet. This means eradicating one’s ego, which is physically symbolised by shaving one’s hair.

In Guruvāyur, Kerala, devotees who suffer from depression weigh themselves against various materials such as fruits, sugar, sugar-candy, butter, rosewater, coconut, plaintain fruits. This is known as *Thulābhāram* (Subramanian 2003:61).

In a village named Rupal in north Gujarat, there is a shrine dedicated to Vardāyini Mātā, goddess who grants boons. On the ninth day of *Navrātri* (Āso sud 9), pilgrims from all over Gujarat throng here, with their personal *maanta*, usually of begetting offspring. They offer ghee to a wooden structure at the centre of which burns a fire. This structure is known as *palli*, erected in the shrine’s complex. It has been observed that some miraculous transformation occurs to the liquid ghee. While offering, if any of it falls on people’s clothes, it washes away easily with only water, without any trace of greasiness or smell of ghee! Many pilgrims do have their *maanta* fulfilled.

Maanta in BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā

(1) Devotees offer *mahāpujā* or *pradakshinā* of Akshar Deri, the miraculous shrine in the BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Gondal. Mahāpujā is also performed in all *shikharbaddh* mandirs.

(2) *Abhishek* of Neelkanth Varni in Bharuch, Tithal, Surat, London, Houston, Chicago, Swāminārāyan Akshardhām (Delhi), Atladrā, Junāgadh, Bochāsan and of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan in Amdavad (see Ch.8 p.60).

(3) Draping a shawl on Pramukh Swami Mahārāj’s *murti* at the mandir in Yagnapurush pol in Amdavad.



mundan in Tirumālā Devasthānam



palli of Vardāyini Mātā, Rupāl, Gujarat

In the town of Bilārā, near Jodhpur, a constantly burning miraculous divo of ghee does not produce any black residue (carbon), as it should by the natural laws of chemistry. Instead it produces saffron (kesar)! Countless followers of this shrine take vows (maanta) of this shrine, dedicated to Aaiji Mātā.



maanta in Yagnapurush pol, Amdavad

In Guruvāyur, an average of about 100 thulābharams are offered daily and on important days, it may increase to 200. The bhakta is weighed against bananas, sugar, jaggery, coconuts, sandalwood or any other item used daily. The weighed items are gifted to the mandir such as, coir, grass, granite stones and cooked foods such as idli and vadā are also used! (Vaidyanathan 2006:69).



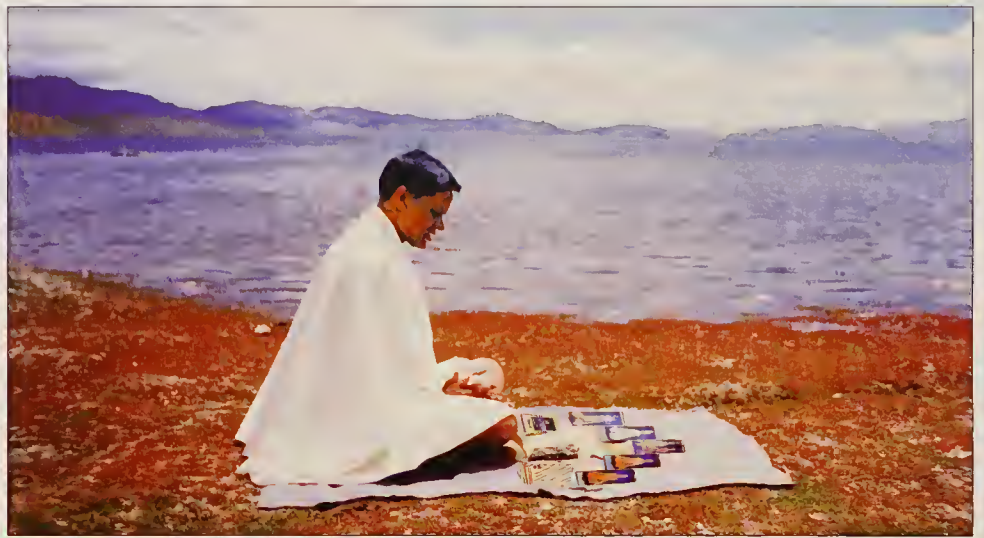
child Thulābharam, Guruvāyur

(4) Do extra mālās.

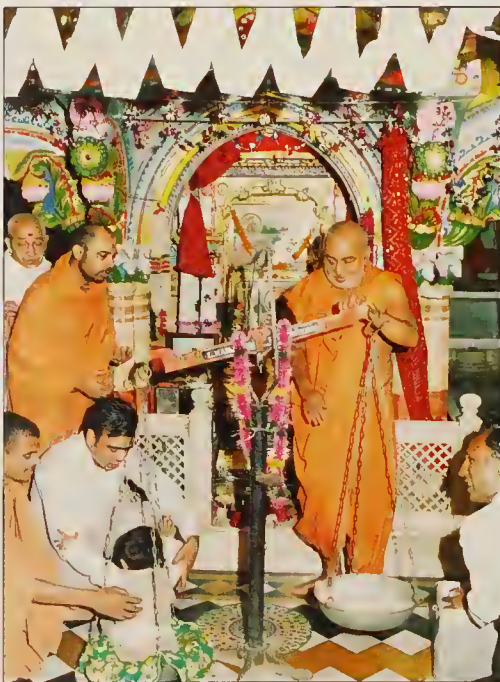
(5) Chant the *Janmangal Nāmāvali Pāth* – uttering 108 divine names of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan (see Ch.20).

(6) Observe *ektānā* or *dhārṇā-pārṇā* till the *prāna pratishthā* of a new mandir. This may last for up to three or more years!

(7) There is also a tradition for devotees to offer a sweet, usually *pendā* as *prasād*, after a *maanta* is fulfilled, in the nearest mandir for distribution to all devotees gathered in the Sunday *satsang sabhā*. *Maantas* include: birth, recovery from a critical illness or surgery, marriage, permanent migration abroad, a good job appointment, promotion, inauguration of a new house, admission into a university and success in an important exam.



BAPS devotee fulfilling his life wish to trek to Mānsarovar and perform his nitya puja on its shore



Pranukh Swami Mahārāj performing a child's sākara tulā in Akshar Deri, Gondal, Saurashtra



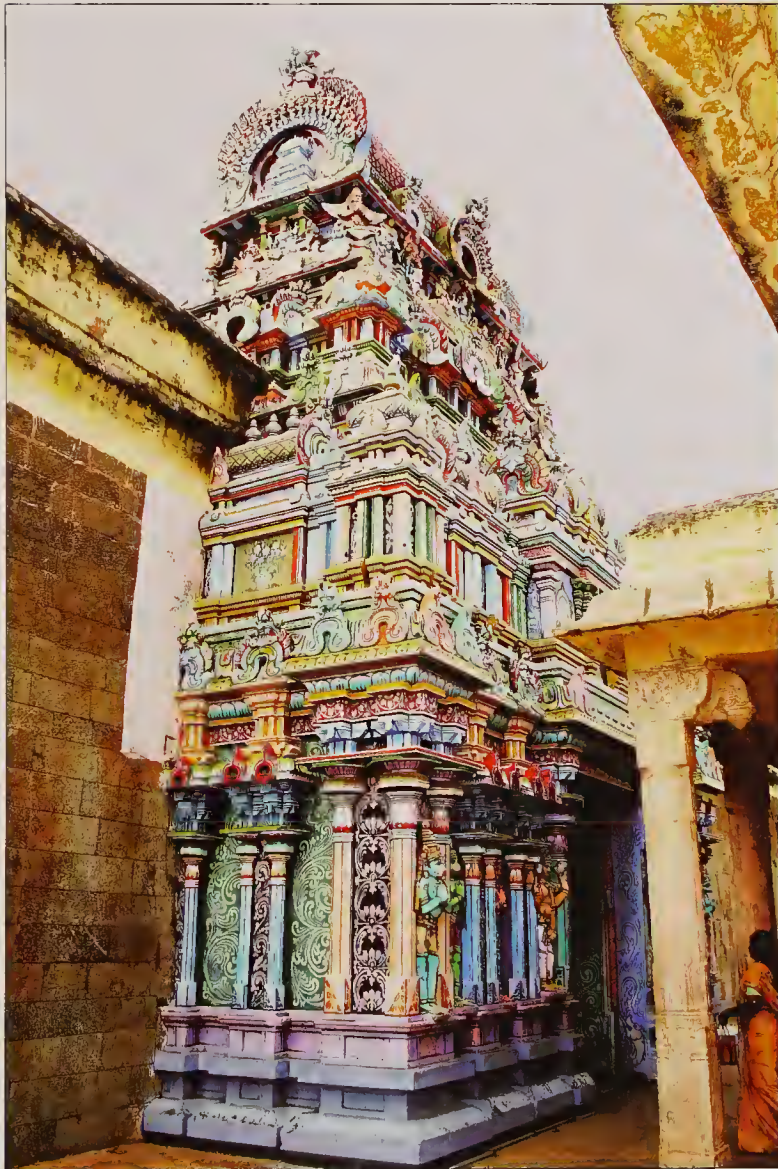
tulā of an infant with dried fruits, which are then donated to the mandir, as a maanta for his good health (BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir; Amdavad)



padlocks on a pillar in the Srirangam mandir in Karnataka. Families afflicted with ghosts and evil spirits lock them on the pillar as maanta to exorcise them.



Pulven – a local violin-type instrument played by a woman for redemption from Kāl Sarp dosh. Sree Janārdana Swamy Temple, Varkalā, Kerala



elephants at the Punnathur Kotta in the Shri Krishna mandir, in Guruvāyur, Kerala, offered after a wish is fulfilled

On Vaikunta Ekadasi in February in Srirangam, Bhagwān Ranganātha is taken in a grand procession out of the sanctum and passes through the gate known as Parampada Vasāl, which is opened only once a year. Bhagwān is attired with rich garments of rubies. Thousands of devotees from all over India follow through this gate and believe it assures their entry into swarg. Hence the gate is also known as Swarg Dwār.



18. Tirth Yātrā (Pilgrimage)

- Purpose of tirth yātrā
- Origin of tirths
- Types of tirths
- Preparations for yātrā
- Tirths of Sanātan Dharma
- Rituals at the tirth
- Ultimate tirth yātrā
- Padyātrā to Ambāji
- Yātrā to Sabarimalai
- Swāminārāyan sampradāya's tirths in Gujarat (map)
- Passion for yātrā on a scooter

Tirth means a sacred place. In Sanskrit, tirth is that 'embankment' or ford which guides mankind out of the samsāra ocean. *Yātrā* means a journey. Hence a *tirth yātrā* is a pilgrimage for redemption from samsāra.

Purpose of tirth yātrā

The aspirant may embark on a *yātrā* for one or more of the following reasons:

- for cleansing sin for the sinful and increasing *punya* (merit) of the good

|| *pāpānām pāpashamanam dharmavruddhistathā satām* ||

– Vishnudharmottara Purāna 3/273/7

- for *prāyascitta* – atonement for an unmeritorious act,
- *pitru tarpan* – offering *pind dān* and prayers to please one's departed forefathers,
- *asthi visarjan* – to sprinkle a deceased relative's ashes in a holy river (see p.153),
- to have darshan of mandirs or miraculous shrines,
- to consolidate faith, devotion to and glory of the Divine.

Tirths also serve an important function in strengthening cross-cultural ties, thus unifying people. For example, *yātriks* – pilgrims, from south India visit Kāshi in the north despite not being conversant in the local language. People from northern India, carry the holy water from the Gangā for *abhishek* on Ramnatha Mahādeva in Rāmeshwar, in the south. Ādi Shankar established a unique legacy vibrant even today, of appointing *pujāris* from one part of India for duty in another. *Pujāris* from Rāmeshwar were chosen to serve in

तीर्थ यात्रा

"Times there will be, a-many, when, gasping for breath, you toil up the face of steep mountains on feet torn and bleeding by passage over rough rocks, sharp shale, and frozen ground, when you will question whether the prospective reward you seek is worth the present price you pay in suffering; but being a good Hindu you will toil on, comforting yourself with the thought that merit is not gained without suffering, and the greater the suffering in this world, the greater the reward in the next."

– Jim Corbett

The Man-eating Leopard of Rudraprayag

One who has no faith in tirths, is a sinner, atheist, doubtful and assesses everything by logic, these five types of people do not reap the merit of tirths.

(Nārad Purāna, Uttar. 62/16-17, Skand Purāna, Vaishnava, Kārtik 4/77).

People should always bathe, donate, chant japa, etc., in tirths. Otherwise they invite disease, poverty and similar afflictions.

(Shiva Purāna, V. 12/5)

In the Vachanāmrut (Gadhadā I-1, II-3), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan quoting the Skand Purāna, forbids committing sinful acts in tirths and advocates the grace of a Satpurush to resolve such sins.

Anyakshetre krutam pāpam tirthakshetre vinashyati, Tirthakshetre krutam pāpam vajralepo bhavishyati.

(Skand Purāna, Vaishnava, Margshirsh, 17/17)

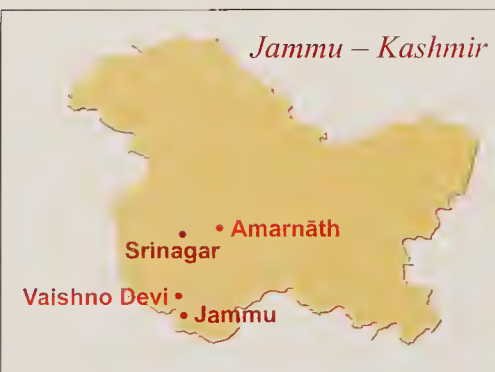
opp. page: Pramukh Swami Mahārāj's tirth yātrā to Kedārñāth (1987)



Swayambhu Jyotirling of ice,
Amarnāth, Himalayas



Vaishno Devi



Badrināth, and from Dwarkā to Jagannāth Puri and vice versa. This promoted solidarity and unity in a land of multiple dialects and sub-cultures. Moreover, pilgrimages draw people away from selfish and mundane pursuits and induce them to think of higher, more lasting moral and spiritual values.

Origin of tirths

Tirths are classified as either *swayambhu* – self-forming, by Divine intent, or *nirmit* – created by holy personages. The 12 Jyotirlings representing Shri Mahādevaji, are examples of self-formed tirths (see table on p.149). The Vedic texts declare that – *āpo vai sarvā devatāhā* – all deities are centred in waters (Taittiriya Samhitā II/6/8/3). The Vāyu Purāna (77/117) and Kurma Purāna (II/37/49-50) declare that all parts of the Himalaya are holy, the Gangā is holy, and rivers entering the sea and all seas are holy.

As for *Nirmit tirths*, the Garud Purāna defines a *tirth* as, “That holy spot which is associated with or habited by sadhus deserving reverence, who are without desires or delusion and who have cleansed their sins by performing tapas.”

The Mahābhārat says:

“Just as certain parts of the body are purer than others, so are certain places on earth more sacred; some on account of their situation, some due to their sparkling waters and others because of the association with saintly people.”
(Anushāsan Parva 108.16-18)

To understand how a place attains sacredness, consider the following analogies and phenomena:

1) An earthly material such as a radioactive isotope has the inherent property of emitting radioactivity for thousands of years. Similarly, a place associated with a pure sadhu who emanates spiritual vibrations can certainly attain ‘divine activity,’ whose ‘half-life’ may depend on the sadhu’s divinity or on the arrival later, of a similar personage who recharges it.

This concept of tirths being revived, is cited in the Bhāgvatam (1.13.10): “It is they (sadhus) who sanctify tirths by their visits, as they carry within their hearts the mace-bearing Vishnu.” Then a mystic or sadhu who has realised Bhagwān can bestow sacredness to a place.

2) Every organism and inanimate object possesses an intrinsic vibration. Researchers have observed this using

Kirlian photography. They ascribe names to the vibrations such as: aura, force field, electromagnetic field, etheric body, astral body, *prāṇic* field and chi. In living organisms, this aura is enhanced by meditation, *prāṇāyāma*, yog and music of a certain beat. If such physical parameters are capable of strengthening the aura, a yogi or sadhu who has awakened his Kundalini or attained rapport with the Supreme Reality, will certainly possess and radiate some form of energy. This energy then pervades any area he visits, inducing vibrations which nullify the discordant, *māyic* turbulence of the area itself. Examples abound in the *śāstras*, illustrating the alteration of consciousness of an organism by such a manner. Within a 300 *gaun* (2,100 km) radius of Lomash rishi's āshrama, carnivora lost their killing instinct, enabling their prey to roam about fearlessly. Similarly, after Neelkanth Varni's (Bhagwān Swāminārāyan) stay with Gopāl Yogi in the Himalayas, some shepherds requested Him to do something about tigers which regularly killed and ate their cows. Moved by their plight, He requested Gopāl Yogi to blow his conch shell. Henceforth wild animals never entered the vicinity of the sound vibrations produced by the conch shell.

Therefore it is not surprising that people who visit *tirths* experience these spiritual vibrations and feel peaceful, solaced and boosted. To cite an example, people experience this in Uttarānchal – the sacred shrines and rivers in the Himalayas north of Haridwār. In addition to the *tirths*, this phenomenon also stems from the collective sacredness accrued over aeons by generations of yogis performing austerities in this region.

In the BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya, an example of a *tirth* being formed by the divinity of sadhus is *Akshar Deri*. This miraculous shrine is located on the ground floor *mandapam* of the Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir in Gondal, not far from Rajkot. Firstly, Shāstriji Mahārāj, the third spiritual successor of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, constructed and consecrated the shrine on the cremation site of Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami, the ideal devotee and abode of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan. The second equally important factor is that Yogiji Mahārāj, the fourth successor, performed its *pujā* for 40 years! Little wonder that the collective divinity has rendered Akshar Deri a profoundly divine *tirth*.



Neelkanth Varni
(Bhagwān Swāminārāyan)

Types of Tirths

1. Swayambhu – formed naturally e.g. the 12 Jyotirlingas, Mansarovar.
2. Daivik – founded by incarnations e.g. Ayodhyā, Dwarkā, Gokul, Mathurā, Rāmeshwaram, etc.
3. Ārsh – founded by rishis and seers e.g. Naimisharanya Kshetra, Akshar Deri (Gondal).
4. Paurānik – place whose glory is extolled by the Purāns.
5. Mānusha – created by man.

The first 4 are sacred in themselves, whilst the 5th acquires sanctity after performing Vedic rites.

Besides these five types, there are also two other forms: *sthāvar* – stationary and *jangam* – mobile. Examples of the latter include: incarnations, sadhus and mystics who have realised Paramātmā. *Sthāvar* tirths are tabulated opposite.



Preparations for yātrā

Before embarking on a *yātrā*, the *shāstras* enjoin several important observances. These are poetically versified in the *Harilīlāmṛutam* (1.19.47-57):

- Know the glory of the *tirth*. Therein the *yātrik* gains knowledge (*jnān*) and from this springs forth *bhakti*. Only then does he gain fruit of the *yātrā*. The *Nārad Purāna* argues that fish and other creatures live in the waters of a holy river or lake, as do birds on the shrines. Yet lacking devotional faith, despite living in a *tirth*, they gain no *punya* or *moksha*. Therefore the proper *bhāva* (sentiments) in approaching a *tirth* is important.

- Offer food to sadhus and *bhaktas* before setting off and after returning, to increase the *punya* of the *yātrā*.

- Carry one's own foodstuffs to cook food during the *yātrā*. *Dān* and alms should not be accepted. Otherwise this nullifies the *punya* gained.

- Offer obeisance to any tirth enroute.

- A man should be accompanied by his wife.

- Practice self-control and self-abnegation, such as: observing *brahmacharya*, having only one meal a day, sleeping on the floor, listening to *kathā*, not wasting even a moment wandering aimlessly, refraining from doing business and avoiding visits to other places nearby, which are not sacred.



Tirths of Sanātan Dharma

12 Jyotirlings (Self-formed Mahadevas – forms of Shiva.

Somnāth Mahādeva (Gujarat), Mahakaleshwar (Ujjain, M.P.), Kedārnāth (Himalayas), Kāshivishwanāth (Banaras, U.P.), Rāmeshwar (Tamil Nadu), Mallikārjun (Tamil Nadu), Omkāreshwar (Amareshwar, M.P.), Bhimāshankar (Maharashtra), Tryambakeshwar (Maharashtra), Parli Vaidyanāth (Bengal), Nāgeshwar (nr. Dwarkā, Gujarat), Ghrisneshwar (nr. Ellora, Mahā.).

Mountains

Himalayas, Girnār, Pāvāgadh Tirumālā hills (A.P.), and others.

Five Lakes

Mansarovar (Tibet), Pampā sarovar (south India), Pushkar sarovar (Rajasthan), Bindu sarovar (Siddhpur, n.Gujarat) Nārāyan sarovar (Kachchh).

Kunds (hot springs)

Gauri Kund, Tapta kund (Himalayas) and others.

Rivers

Saraswati, Gangā, Yamunā, Saryu, Narmadā, Sindhu, Kāveri, Tāpi, Mahi, Godāvari, Ghelā, Und, Gondli and others.

• Avoid committing sinful acts during the yātrā and at the tirth, for the Skand Purāna stipulates:

*Anyakshetre krutam pāpam tirthakshetre vinashyati,
Tirthakshetre krutam pāpam vajralepo bhavishyati*

– the pāp committed elsewhere is destroyed at the tirth, but that committed at the tirth becomes imperishable.

• To walk barefooted to the tirth, known as pad yātrā. There are two added variations of this: dandvat yātrā and gabad yātrā. The latter involves rolling on the ground! The greater the suffering and hardship, the greater the merit. Tibetan pilgrims perform parikramā of Mount Kailas by dandvat or trundling on hands and knees.

In the past, yātrās were considered extremely meritorious, since people had to be fit and spiritually

12 Jyotirlings



Foodstuffs usually taken by Gujarati pilgrims on a yātrā:



farsi puri



sukhadi



sakkarpara



In his book, *Man-eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*, Jim Corbett cites the terrifying ordeal of the 60,000 pilgrims who annually trudged on the pilgrim route to Badrināth from Rudraprayāg, in the early 20th century. From 1918 to 1926, a man-eating leopard claimed 124 victims; many of whom it dragged out of pilgrim shelters and houses at night! (1992:7)



young pilgrim offering diyā

committed to brave the potential hazards along the way, of: looters, wild animals, dust and rain storms, treacherous river crossings and landslides in the Himalayas. It was not uncommon for *yātriks* to perish along the way. Therefore they tended to travel in groups. Even so, the danger of wild fauna remained. Crocodiles inhabited almost all water bodies until recent times, necessitating extreme caution while bathing. Tigers, lions, leopards, and wild elephants were common in different parts of India.

From this, one can appreciate Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's astonishing feat during His seven-year *kalyān yātrā*, having set off alone, at the tender age of eleven! (ref. p.147). This historic *yātrā* forms the theme of *Mystic India*, a large format film released worldwide in 2005. A similar version *Neelkanth Yātrā*, is a permanent part of Swāminārāyan Akshardhām complex in New Delhi.

Rituals at the tirth

Yātriks (pilgrims) usually observe the following rituals at a tirth. The sentiment underlying the majority of these is the *yātrik's* spiritual edification:

- *snān* – bathing – in kund, river, lake or ocean. With the exception of an order of ascetics known as *Nāgās*, Hindus





bathe in tirths with clothes, since a river, and water itself represents a deity. The greatest sacred bathing ritual in Sanātān Dharma occurs during the Mahā Kumbha Melā (see Ch.14).

Further, if the *yātrik* recalls any of his relatives while bathing, the latter receive one-eighth of his *punya*.

• *mundan* (tonsure) – Males have their heads shaved, symbolising humility and *sharanāgati* – surrenderance. Women may have their braids cut ‘two-finger breadths.’ In Venkateshwara Bālāji on Tirumālā hills, women also undergo *mundan*, as an offering to Bhagwān, a rite known as *Vazhipad* or redemption of a vow.

- darshan – of *murtis*, sadhus and other *yātriks*.
- *pujā* – worship ritual of the *murti*, shrine or spot.
- *japa* – mantra chanting in the form of *dhun* or *mālā*.
- *dhyāna* / *prārthnā* – meditation and prayer.
- *kathā* – listening to discourses.
- *abhishek* – bathing deities with milk / water (see Ch.8).
- *pradakshinā/parikramā* of the shrine.

Circumambulating a mountain, lake or river is known as *parikramā*.



pilgrims performing puja rituals on the ghāts (steps) of a sacred river

Rituals at the tirth



bathing in the Gangā at Prayāg ghāt, Kāshi (Banaras)



pujā ritual with coconut and other pujā dravyas, Tirumālā, Tirupati



pilgrims first bathe in the Agni Theertham (ocean) before entering the Rāmeshwaram mandir, south India



listening to kathā of sadhus, Sārangpur, Saurashtra



pinda offerings to ancestors at Chānod, on the banks of river Narmadā, south Gnjarat



BAPS youths meditating on the ghāt of Nārāyan Sarovar, Chhapiyā, (U.P.), (Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's birth place)



*Tibetans performing parikramā of Mt. Kailas,
by offering prostrations*



parikramā of Mt. Girnar (Saurashtra)



*bathing at Gangāsāgar (Kapilmuni's āshrama),
Gulf of Bengal*



*mātru shrāddh rites at Bindu Sarovar; Siddhpur;
north Gujarat (site of āshrama of Kapil muni's parents –
Kardam risli & Devahuti mātā).*



*asthi visarjan – dispersing ashes in the river Ghelā,
Gadhadā, Saurashtra*



dandvat yātrā to Ambāji, north Gujarat



tarpan rites at Haridwār

There is a Hindi saying about the immense difficulty in reaching Gangāsagar, an island-tirth in the Gulf of Bengal:

har tirth bār bār, Gangāsagar ek bār.

– other tirths [can be performed] many times, [but] Gangāsagar only once.

The sheer faith of Hindu *yātriks* performing *parikramās* can be gleaned by the distances and hence the duration involved:

Yātrā parikramā distance	Duration	Height
Mt.Kailās : 48 km.	3-4 days	20,000 ft.
Mānsarovar : 95 km.	4-5 days	15,800 ft.
Mt.Girnār : 36 km.	2-3 days	—
River Narmadā : 2,560 km.	Over 1 year	—

- *dān* – offering alms or money – to the deity, sadhus and poor.
- *shrāddh* ritual – offering oblations to ancestors.
- *asthi visarjan* – sprinkling ashes of a deceased in the water.
- *vrāt-upavās* – fasting, having frugal meals or *farār*.
- *yagna (homa)* – offerings in the sacred fire.
- Permanent residence – by aged or retired individuals, who wish to spend the rest of their lives in spiritual pursuit. Kāshi, Mathurā and the banks of the Gangā are common choices. It is also considered highly meritorious to die in a *tirth*.

Ultimate tirth yātrā

The ongoing *sāadhanā* of an aspirant is traversing the *samsāra yātrā* – pilgrimage of life. Towards this end, spiritual endeavours such as: *tapas*, *yagna*, *dān*, *tirth yātrā*, study of *shāstras* and so forth are essential. These purify and consolidate faith and devotional zeal. However the ultimate endeavour and goal, is to transcend *samsāra* by realising *Paramātmā* and so attain *moksha*. This is only possible by recourse to the *Jangam tirth* – the Satpurush.

Similarly, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's paramhansa-poet, Muktānand Swami exhorts:

mahā ārti of the river Ghelā, Gadhadā, Saurashtra





*Kāshi Kedār ke Dwārkā dode, jogani jukti na jāni re,
ferā farīne pāchho gharno gharmā, godho jodāno jem ghāni re..*

– even if the aspirant visits Kāshi, Kedārñāth or Dwarkā, if he does not realise the manifest – *pragat* – form of Paramātmā, his efforts lead nowhere, just as an ox turns the grinding mill (walking all day in a circular motion), yet he remains in the same spot.

In the Bhāgvatam, Shri Krishna too puts all spiritual endeavours into perspective, revealing the most effective:

*Na rodhayati mām yogo na sāmkhya dharma eva cha,
Na swādhyāyastapastyāgo neshtāpurtam na dakshinā.
Vratāni yagnashchhandāmsi tirthāni niyamā yamāhā,
Yathāvarundhe satsangaha sarvasangāpaho hi mām.*

– Bhāgvatam 11.12.1,2

– Ashtāng Yog, Sāmkhya (system of philosophy), Vedic study, *tapas*, renunciation, offerings in the sacred fire, beneficial deeds for society such as digging wells and planting trees, *dān*, fasting, *yagnas*, chanting mantras, *tirth yātrās* and observing major and minor spiritual injunctions do not please me, as does satsang.

Satsang denotes association with the Satpurush. However, Shri Krishna's injunction does not in any way preclude observance of the above endeavours. It only means that if the aspirant performs them of his own volition, he will accrue fruits which lead to moksha after a long span of time – *urukāle* (Bhāgvatam 10.84.11). Whereas by implicitly obeying the Satpurush and developing *ātmabuddhi* (one-ness) with him, the gates of moksha will open readily (Bhāgvatam 3.29.20).

Thus the aspirant, having traversed the samsāra yātrā, attains the final goal, the lotus-feet of Paramātmā. This is the ultimate *tirth yātrā*.

The mystic and poet Narsinh Mehtā, lauds the glory of such a Satpurush in his famous bhajan:

*Prāna thaki mune vaishnava
vā'lā...*

*adsath tirath mārā santne charane,
koti Gangā, koti Kāshi re*

– Paramātmā says, “The sadhu is dearer to me than my heart...
The 68 tirths reside at his feet, his glory surpasses ten million Gangās and ten million Kāshis.”

Pilgrim's necessities

Foodsnacks:

chevdo, sev-mamrā, sukhdi, groundnut / almond paak, dry fruits & nuts, farsi puri, dhebhra, chhundo (sweet, grated mango pickle), gānthiā, mesub, lādus of sunth (ginger powder), ghee and jaggery – for warmth & stamina.

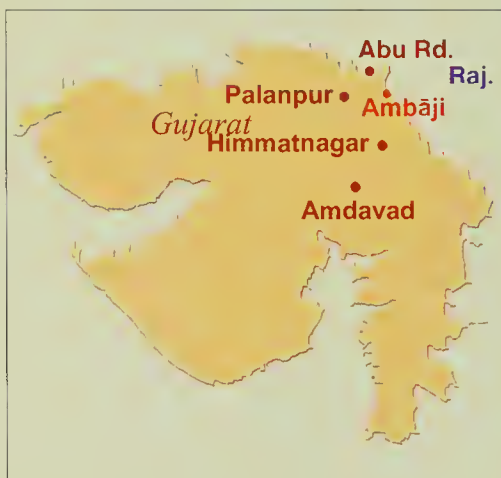
other items:

bed roll, warm clothing, waterproof anorak, plastic sheet(s), stove & kerosene, water jug, utensils, knife, disposable dishes, torch & batteries, muslin cloth to filter water, *lotah*, first aid and medications, walking stick, maps & diary.

*Pramukh Swami Mahārāj bathing
Harikrishna Mahārāj with the sacred
water of the river Ghelā, Gadhadā,
Saurashtra (Swāminārāyan
Mahāmantra Bicentenary, 8/1/2002).*



Padyātrā to Ambāji



One of the most popular and perhaps arduous *yātrā*, is the *padyātrā* – pilgrimage on foot – to Ambāji. It is a sacred town located 1600 feet above sea level, on the Arasur hills in the Ambica forest, on the northern border of Gujarat.

It is one of the 51 Shakti Piths – places where 51 parts and ornaments of the dead body of Devi Sati fell on the earth. It is believed that her heart fell on top of the Gabbar hill. Known as Shri Ārāsuri Ambāji Shakti Pith, it is considered more sacred than other Shakti Piths.

Gabbar hill's sanctity

(1) When Bhagwān Shri Rāma and Lakshman were searching for Sitāji, they arrived at Shrungi rishi's āshrama. He advised them to offer obeisance to Devi Ambāji at Gabbar. They did so and Shakti Mātā gifted a miraculous arrow named 'Ajay'. With it Shri Rāma later vanquished Rāvana.

(2) It is here that Bhagwān Shri Krishna underwent *chaul* samskāra (tonsure) during childhood, while being cared for by his foster parents, Nanda and Yashoda.

(3) The Gabbar (originally Garbhar) hill is also the origin of the Gujarati *Garbā Nrutya* – women's traditional folk dance. Ushā, grand-daughter of Bali Rājā, first danced this *nrutya* on earth with *Garbhdeep* (divo in an earthen pot with holes) and *Lāsyā Geet*, when she arrived here with Aniruddha, Shri Krishna's grandson, after their marriage. Hence this dance became known as the *Garbh Deep Nrutya*.

About 7 to 8 million devotees visit Ambāji annually on *Purnimās*. Many perform *padyātrā* – walk, from distant places such as Mumbai, Surat and Rajasthan, on the *Purnimās* of Kārtik, Chaitra, Bhādrapad and Āso. On Bhādrapadi Purnimā, considered most meritorious, about 1.5 million pilgrims visit Ambāji. The pilgrimage ends only when the pilgrims offer worship at the shrine on Gabbar hill.

Along the way, charities and private individuals provide free food and medical treatment. Some groups of pilgrims leave home with Ambā Mātā's *rath* – chariot, which they pull devotionally while singing bhajans and dance the *Garbā nrutya*. Pilgrims willingly tolerate hardships, spending nights on the wayside and bathing in streams or bore-wells of farms. Many bravely also take their toddlers in prams to fulfil a *maanta* and receive Ambā Mātā's blessings.



Ambā Mātā's rath



women carrying garbo



baby pilgrim in pram



on the way to Anibāji



singing bhajans and playing garbā



serving buttermilk



first aid



pulling Mātāji's rath



arrival in Ambāji



shrine on Gabbar hill

Yātrā to Sabarimalai



Bhagwān Ayyappā



18 steps



shrine at Sabarimalai



pilgrims carrying the irumudi kettu

One of the most popular *tirth yātrā* in south India occurs every year from November to January 14th – the day of Makar Jyoti. During this 41-day *yātrā*, lakhs of pilgrims trek to Sabarimalai, a shrine located 3000 ft. above sea level, in the Sahyadri mountains in Kerala. It is dedicated to Bhagwān Ayyappā. He was born as *Hari Har putra*, when Har – Shiva embraced Hari Vishnu – as *Mohini* avatār, during *Samudra Manthan*.

Prior to the *yātrā*, pilgrims have to observe *brahmacharya* for 40 days, a period known as one *mandal*. They carry on their heads a sacred cloth bag in two parts, known as *irumudi kettu*. The front part (*nuunmudi*) contains puja items such as coconuts, dry fruit, *poha*, ghee, honey, jaggery, sandal paste, camphor and turmeric. The second part (*pinmudi*) contains the pilgrim's personal belongings. Along the way through the forest, they chant the mantra: *Om Swamiye sharanam Ayyappā* – “You are my refuge, O Ayyappā”. En route, they bathe at Erumeli in the river Pamba, which is regarded as sacred as the Gangā. Then they trek about 7 km. from Erumeli to Sabarimalai in two to three hours. Women aged under 10 years and those who have passed their fertility age are allowed to visit the shrine.

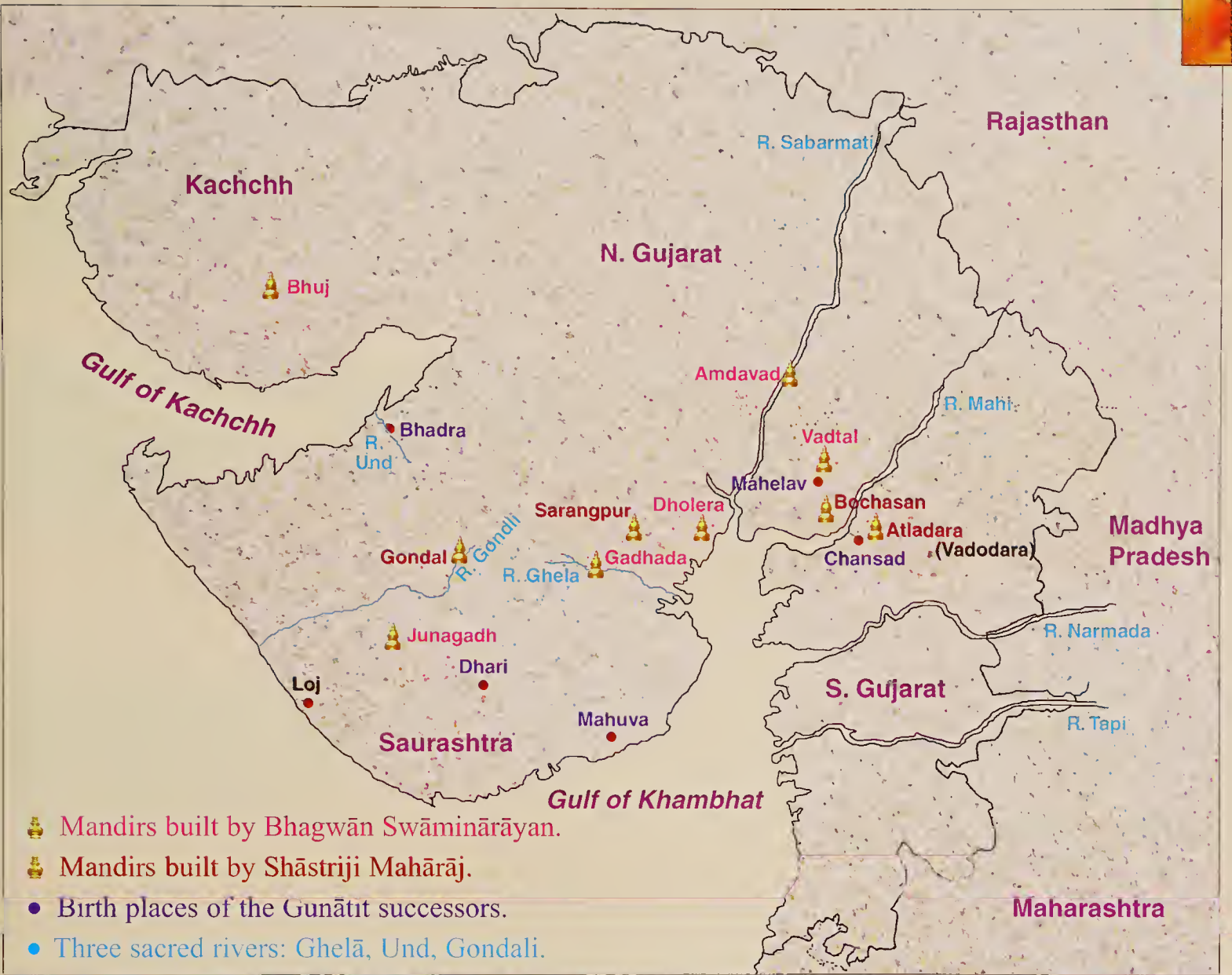
Ritual

Pilgrims crack the coconut with the ghee on the *peedom* – a stone on the right side of the first of 18 steps leading up to the shrine. Half is offered into the *homakundam* – fire pit. The other half is given to the *pujāri* for *abhishekam* in the shrine and taken back as *prasād*. The pilgrims touch the first step with their hands in reverence and then ascend with the right foot.

The shrine also opens on the first five days of every Malayalam month for pilgrims. The most important day is the Malayalam New Year day, usually on 14th April, known as *Vishu*. Pilgrims who wish for offspring tie a small bell around their neck to perform *shayana pradikshanam* after a dip in the *Bhasmakulam* – a water tank in the mandir campus. This involves rolling on the bare ground around the mandir.

The *prasād* from the temple given to pilgrims is *khir*, which is cooked rice, jaggery and ghee packed in tins and plastic pouches. It remains edible after they return home 10 to 15 days later.

Swāminārāyan sampradāya's tirths in Gujarat



Passion for yātrā on a bicycle

Pujābhai Makwānā of Amdavad, aged 75, cycled 1,800 kms. to Chhapiyā in 29 days, averaging 50-60 km. per day, starting on 15/2/10. **Route:** Shāmlāji, Udaipur, Chittor, Kotā, Shivapuri, Jhānsi, Kānpur, Ayodhyā, Chhapiyā. **Diet:** mangoes, bananas, papaya, cooked rice with jaggery. Slept on roadside or shrines. Met 3 thieves in Kānpur. Instead of looting him, they offered *laddus*, rice and *dāl* and let him go! Other yātrās include cycling 1,100 kms. to Delhi in 20 days for the Akshardhām *utsav* in 2005.

Total distance travelled in many yātrās: 7,500 kms.

Passion for yātrā on a scooter

Dilipsinh Chauhan (54) and his wife (47) annually embark on a *tirth yātrā* on a scooter. Their toughest yātrā in 2007: 21st April – 23 May 2007 (32 days) – to Delhi, Haridwār, Panch Kedār, Ukhimath, Badrināth, Joshimath, Ayodhyā, Chhapiyā, Kāshi, Sitāmadhi, Prayāg, Chitrakut, Zambva, Dākor, Amdavad.

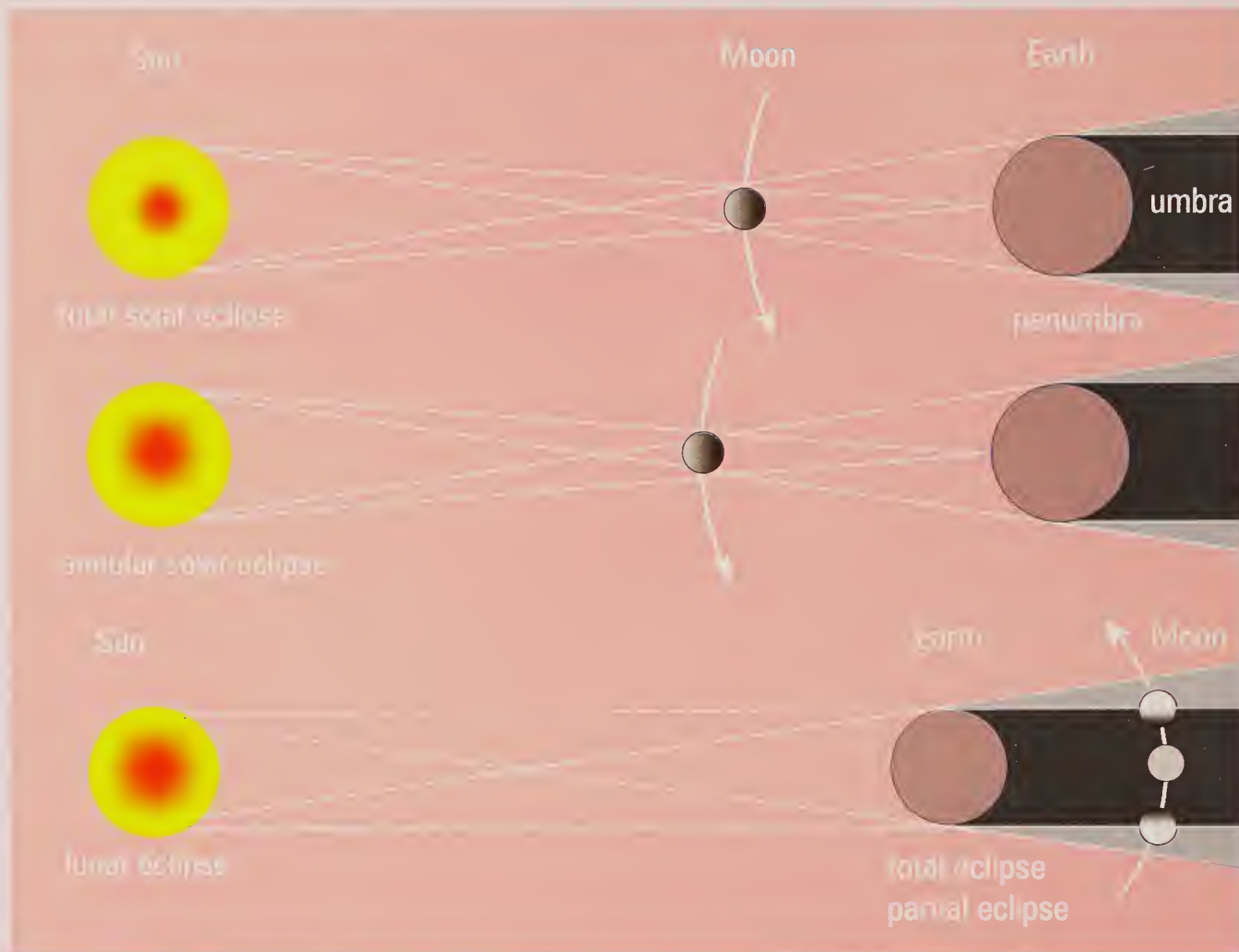
Mileage: 5,386 kms. **Cost:** approx Rs. 40,000.



Pujābhāi on his way to Delhi, 2005



Dilipsinh with his wife on scooter





19. Grahan (Eclipse)

- Origin
- Dān (donation)
- Shrāddh (homage ritual for ancestors)
- Punya (merit)
- Solar eclipse celebrated in Kurukshetra
- Lunar eclipse celebrated in Kāshi
- Effects

ग्रहण

Origin

A story in the Purāna says that Simhika, one of Kashyap rishi's wives requested him for progeny at a peculiar time. Infuriated, he gave her a son, Rāhu, who was as dreadful as the deity of death. Soon after birth, he fought with Aditi's son and was defeated. Humiliated, he performed severe austerities in the Himalayas for ten thousand years. This pleased Brahmā, who offered a boon. Rāhu requested that he be granted the status of a planet, immortality, victory over the devas and power to devour two luminaries. Brahmā granted the boon but added, "You shall find it extremely difficult to digest these two."

Rāhu then rushed at the two luminaries, the sun and moon. However Vishnu hurled his discus (*sudarshan chakra*) and beheaded him and said, "Let the Creator's words not be wasted. In your respective periods you may devour the two luminaries and thereby indicate good and bad occurrences for the world."

Sentiments

Just as the sun and moon are eclipsed by evil in the form of Rāhu and Ketu, jivas have been clouded by the darkness of *māyā*. For liberation from this darkness, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan advocates *āsharo* – refuge of Paramātmā and *ātmabuddhi* – associating with the Satpurush and devotees (Vachanāmṛut Jetalpur 1).

Rituals

Great sanctity is attached to the period of *grahan*, when the seers enjoin bathing, *dān* and *shrāddh*. The *Shatatapa* states that bathing, *tapas*, *dān* and *shrāddh* during eclipses yield inexhaustible *punya*. The Mahābhārat (Van Parva 200-25) cites that, on *ayana* and *Vishuva* days and during solar

The real cause of eclipses was known to Indian astronomers several centuries before the rishi Varāhamihir (505 CE). He reveals this in his Bruhat Samhitā (5/8, 13): "In a lunar eclipse the moon enters the shadow of the earth and in a solar eclipse, the moon enters the sun's disc. In this manner, the seers endowed with divine insight, explained the causes of eclipses. Hence Rāhu is not at all the cause of eclipses."

He also cites that the moon has two nodes, northern and southern. The ascending node is Rāhu and descending Ketu (5/15).

opp. page:

top – types of eclipses

bottom – a lunar eclipse over

Hong Kong, in sequence

and lunar eclipse, one should donate land with *dakshinā* (money) to a pious brahmin.

With their *tapas* and meditative insight, the rishis also revealed the detrimental effects on the mental and spiritual states. To prevent these effects, they prescribed rituals and observances such as the cessation of worldly activities and instead, chanting Paramātmā's name. The latter is known as *nām japa*, which has immense glory and *punya*.

|| Gokotidānam grahane khagasya prayāg gangodaka kalpavāsaha
yagnayutam merusuvarnadānam Govindkirtanam samam shatanshe ||

– Shri Haribhaktivilas 11/385

'One should chant japa during an eclipse; one should not bathe or eat food during that time. When the sun & moon are free from eclipse, one should bathe and partake of food.'

– Shivarahasya.

– the *punya* accrued by chanting Paramātmā's name is not equal to even one-hundredth of that accrued by donating one crore cows during a solar eclipse, by living in Prayāg or Gangā for one *Kalpa* (8,640,000,000 years), performing 10,000 *yagnas* and donating gold equal to mount Meru!

Food prohibition and *japa* is enjoined in the Rig Veda (III/62/10).

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan advocates:

|| Raverindoshchoparāge jāyamāne - parāhā kriyāhā
hitwāshu shuchibhihi sarvaihi kāryāhā Krishnamanorjapaha ||

– Shikshāpatrī 86

– during the solar and lunar eclipses, devotees should suspend all their usual activities and chant Bhagwān's name or mantra.

|| Jātāyāmatha tanmuktau krutwā snānam sachelakam
deyam dānam gruhijanaihi shaktyā-nyaistwarchya Ishvaraha ||

– Shikshāpatrī 87

– when the eclipse is over, they should bathe with their clothes on. Householders should give alms according to their means and ascetics shall perform puja of Paramātmā.

He also prohibits food during eclipse and emphatically advocates bhajan. This can be in the form of chanting the Swāminārāyan *dhun* or *samkirtan* – singing bhajans, extolling, reciting and listening to Paramātmā's *lilā*. Touching other objects is also forbidden. Therefore while offering such bhakti, people sit either on the bare floor, jute

*Sankrame grahane chaiva na snāyād
yastu mānavaha,
saptajaumasu kushthi syāt
dukhabhāgi cha sarvadā.*

– Bruhadvasishtha in Vāchaspatyam
p.2751.

– one who does not bathe after
sankrānti and eclipse, suffers from
skin disease for seven births and
always remains in misery.



cloth or a woollen blanket. Staunch Hindus observe this sincerely.

Sleeping during eclipse is also strictly forbidden. Only the young and ill are exempted from the injunctions of food and sleep.

To protect dry foodstuffs, grain, flour and other edibles such as medicine and water, the shāstras advocate *darbh* grass stalks to be placed on the respective containers. This is believed to nullify the detrimental effects of the rays.

The ritual of using *darbh* grass stalks (*Desmodium bipinnata*) to nullify the harmful effects of rays emanating during an eclipse may not appear scientific today. However this does not negate its effectivity. Future research may verify this. Whatever the rishis proclaimed was true, though they may not always have divulged the reasons. Consider a similar example. They advocated offering cow's ghee and burning cow dung cakes as fuel in a yagna to purify the surroundings and to ward off evil.

The punyakāl (meritorious period) of an eclipse is the period the eclipse is visible to the eye.

Dān (donation)

*Sarvam bhumisamam dānam sarve Vyāsasamā dvijaha,
sarvam gangāsamam toyam grahane nā-tra samshayaha.*

– Vāchaspatyam p.2751

– that donation given during eclipse is equal to donating the earth. During eclipse, all those who receive donations are equal to brahmins, and all waters, without doubt, become as pure as that of the Gangā.

Over the whole of ancient and medieval Bhārat, kings and the affluent religiously donated land or villages during eclipses. The Pattadakal pillar inscription of the Western Chalukya king Kirtivarman II, records a gift of fields on a total solar eclipse in Shrāvan, on 25th June 754 CE (Kane 1994 V I:245).

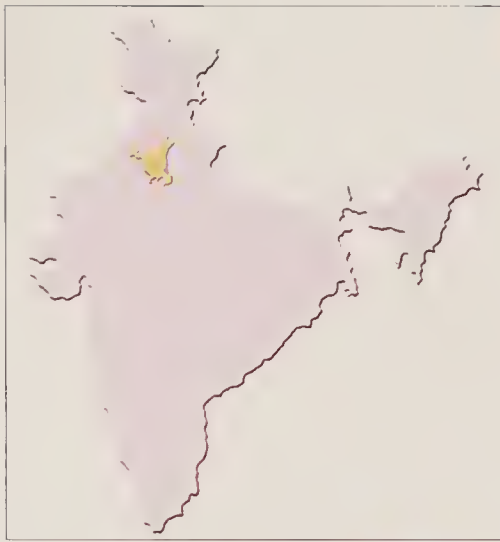
Shrāddh (homage ritual for ancestors)

The Yājñavalkya Smṛuti (10-218) also cites eclipses among the proper times for *shrāddh*. However this is practically impossible for two reasons: (1) most eclipses are short and (2) eating food is forbidden during an eclipse (Mitākshara on Yājñavalkya, I-217-218).

Chudāmani eclipse

Texts stipulate that a Chudāmani eclipse yields 10 million times the merit as that of an eclipse on other week days. This is the name given to the conjunction when a solar eclipse occurs on a Sunday and a lunar on Monday.

– Kālavivek 523, Kālanirnay 351



A total eclipse of the sun is cited in the world's oldest *shāstra*, in the *Rig Veda* (V.40.5,6,8)

Kurukshetra – site of the Mahābhārata battle.

It is believed that many prominent rishis performed tapas here, which rendered the area great sanctity. Therefore this area was chosen as the site of the Mahābhārata's battle, such that any man or animal that died on this field would attain Swarg.

Punya (merit)

The Purāns and other texts made some distinctions regarding *punya* – spiritual merit between eclipses in certain months and bathing in certain rivers or holy places.

Vyas proclaims that, “A lunar eclipse is one hundred thousand times (more meritorious than an ordinary day) and a solar eclipse ten times more than the lunar. And if the waters of the Gangā are near (for a bath) then a lunar is one crore times (more meritorious) and a solar ten times more than the lunar” (quoted by Hemadri, 12th century, on *Kālanirnay* 384).

The *Kālanirnay* glorifies river Godāvari for a bath during a lunar eclipse and the Narmadā for a solar. The *Devi Purāna* declares: “an eclipse in Kārtik has the greatest *punya* at the confluence of the Gangā and Yamunā, in Margashirsh at Devikā, in Posh Narmadā and in Magh, Sannihita is auspicious.”

Solar eclipse celebrated in Kurukshetra

Countless Hindus celebrate the solar eclipse in the pond at Thaneshvar, fed by the river Saraswati, in the great plains of Kurukshetra, 120 miles northwest of Delhi, by ritual bathing, *dān* and so forth. The *shāstras* describe a unique relationship between an eclipse and Kurukshetra.

Just as the various organs of the body have their function, similarly, the earth – symbolic as a body – has various areas which are also of scientific importance. For example, as the head is to the body, the Gauri peak in the Himalayas is to earth. In the same sequence, the foothills are considered as the feet. The adjacent left and right areas are considered the arms and so on.

The whole of geographical Bhārat also reflects such symbolism. It is a scientifically proven fact that the celestial bodies do not affect the earth in the same manner in all areas. In some areas celestial bodies do exert stronger or lesser effects. Similarly, these bodies affect wind and water differently. This is reflected by the different weather conditions prevailing and therefore resulting in varied vegetation and life forms in these areas.

In the Vedas, Kurukshetra is known as *Kurukshetram Brahmasadan* – the dwelling of Brahmā. Just as the *jiva* resides predominantly in the heart of the human body,

similarly Kurukshetra is the heart of the earth. The Atharva Veda (12-1-22) says:

Sa no bhumihī pranamasyurdadhātu

– that land (Kurukshetra) bestows *prāna* and life on earth.

In this universe, the one and only source of *prāna* is the sun (Atharva Veda 21/27/7).

Therefore during a solar eclipse, Rāhu prevents solar rays – albeit – *prāna* – from reaching the life forms on earth. Therefore *prāna* energy is minimised on earth. That is why, during this period the rishis enjoin people to minimise their daily activities, to maintain, stabilise and charge their limited intrinsic *prāna shakti* by doing bhajan, religious rituals and activities. If this is not observed, the heart, which is the *prānic* centre in the body, is affected detrimentally.

Similarly, the earth's heart being Kurukshetra, requires its own *prāna* to be maintained and boosted. Therefore people perform similar religious rituals in Kurukshetra to boost earth's *prāna*.

Hence performing such rituals in Kurukshetra is of greater importance and more meritorious than performing them elsewhere on earth.

During the partial solar eclipse on 20th June 1955, about four lakh people bathed at Kurukshetra and Sanyahet (ancient river Sannihita).

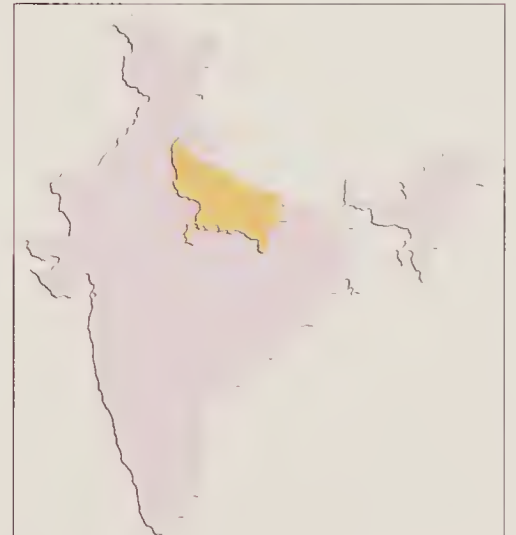
Lunar eclipse celebrated in Kāshi

Just as Kurukshetra is considered the earth's heart, similarly, the rishis ascribe Kāshi as the earth's mind. And the deity of the mind is *Chandra* (moon). Hence the moon continually charges the mind's – Kāshi's – energy.

During a lunar eclipse, lunar energy is severed by Ketu. Similar to the preservation of *prāna* energy during a solar eclipse, the rishis advocate conserving and preserving mental energy during a lunar eclipse. Therefore they enjoin man to perform religious rituals and rites in Kāshi – *grahane tu Kāshi makare prayāge* – *grahan* in Kāshi, *Makar Sankrānti* in Prayāg – to maintain mental vitality. Kāshi's glory is extolled in the Vedas. Brahmā, the Creator recited the Vedas in this sacred city.



*Solar eclipse visible in Amdavad,
15th January, 2010*



To perform the rituals, an area of five *kosh* (12.5 km.) around Kāshi is considered ideal. These include bathing in the Gangā and darshan of Kāshivishvanāth Mahādeva (Atharva Veda 6-24-1).

The sages and rishis also gleaned the effects of astronomical events such as eclipses on life on earth. By their *tapas* and insight they enjoined special observances and rituals to circumvent the harmful effects of eclipses. These effects not only concerned the body, but the mind and *ātmā* too.

Effects

Eclipses have detrimental effects on living organisms in several ways. The rays reaching earth during eclipses hamper the digestive system and it is said that some domestic animals such as dogs naturally do not touch food during eclipses. The rays also have harmful effects on freshly cooked food. Therefore food intake is strictly forbidden during eclipse. The shāstras claim that the rays during an eclipse also harm the foetus in a pregnant woman.

Varāhamihir's Bruhat Samhitā (V-43) describes ten kinds of eclipses; *Sarya*, *Apasarya*, *Leha*, *Grasana*, *Nirodha*, *Avamardana*, *Aroha*, *Aghrata*, *Madhyatamas* and *Tamontya*. Each type exerts its own effects on terrestrial life. For instance, during the *Leha* (licking), the eclipsed area is enveloped all round (or licked) by 'tongues' of darkness. All beings will be happy and there will be plenty of water on earth (V-45). In *Avamardana* (crushing), when the eclipse is total and lasts long, there will be destruction of prominent kings and leading countries (V-48). In the *Madhyatamas* (darkness in the centre), the shadow appears in the centre of the disc, leaving the surrounding parts bright. In this, people in the central regions will suffer harm, and humanity in general will be gripped with fear and stomach disorders (V-51).

Varāhamihir further provides astonishing details of effects deduced from the different colours of the eclipsed disc (V-53 to 59). For example, if the colour is green, all sorts of diseases will afflict people and crops will be destroyed by floods, drought, etc. If the disc appears reddish or golden, a famine may occur. The rishi then describes the effects when different planets such as Mars, Venus, etc., conjoin with either

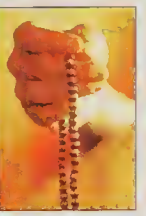
Kāshi's spirituality:

Gautam Buddha, who did not believe in the Vedas, chose Sārnāth, an area in Kāshi, to found the administrative centre of his sect.

Generally, the shāstras prohibit food nine hours (3 prahars) and 12 hours (4 prahars) prior to lunar and solar eclipses, respectively.

This period of 3 or 4 prahars, preceding an eclipse is known as 'vedha'.

In 1791, at the age of ten, Ghanshyām (Bhagwān Swāmīnārāyan) accompanied his pundit father, Dharmadeva to Kāshi, for the observance of the lunar eclipse. During the period, they sat chanting Rāma dhum on the Manikarnika ghāt. Afterwards they bathed in the river Gangā. It was after this, that Kāshi's pundits invited Dharmadeva to preside as a judge in a philosophical debate, in which Ghanshyām defeated the pundits by establishing the sound philosophy of Vishishtadvait. (Dave 2003 I:79)



the solar or lunar eclipse, and which areas and peoples of Bhārat will be affected (V-60 to 68).

Charak, the ancient rishi of Ayurveda, forbids students to study during *mahāgrahopagamane* – eclipses, among other natural phenomena such as conflagration, earthquake and twilight (Charak Samhitā, Sutrasthān 8–24). Manu too forbids study during eclipse. He also forbids looking at the sun during an eclipse, in a water reflection and at midday (Manu Smṛiti 4-105, 37).

When viewing solar eclipses, modern scientists too take precautionary measures such as wearing special goggles which prevent harmful rays damaging the retina. This proves that eclipses do harm the physical body.

*pilgrims bathing in the Gangā at
Haridwār, after the solar eclipse on
the morning of 19th March, 2007*



श्री जनमंगल नामावली

ॐ श्रीकृष्णाय नमः	ॐ पाषण्डोच्छेदनपटवे नमः	ॐ सहजानन्दाय नमः
ॐ श्रीवासुदेवाय नमः	ॐ स्वस्वरूपाचलस्थितये नमः	ॐ साध्वीधर्मप्रवर्तकाय नमः
ॐ नरनारायणाय नमः	ॐ प्रशान्तमूर्तये नमः	ॐ कन्दर्पदर्पदलनाय नमः
ॐ प्रभवे नमः	ॐ निर्दोषाय नमः	ॐ वैष्णवक्रतुकारकाय नमः
ॐ भविअधर्मात्मजाय नमः	ॐ असुरगुर्वादिमोहनाय नमः	ॐ पंचायतनसम्मानाय नमः
ॐ अजन्मने नमः	ॐ अतिकारुण्यनयनाय नमः	ॐ नैष्ठिकव्रतपोषकाय नमः
ॐ कृष्णाय नमः	ॐ उद्धवाध्वप्रवर्तकाय नमः	ॐ प्रगल्भाय नमः
ॐ नारायणार्थे नमः	ॐ महाव्रताय नमः	ॐ निःस्पृहाय नमः
ॐ हरये नमः	ॐ साधुशीलाय नमः	ॐ सत्यप्रतिज्ञाय नमः
ॐ हरिकृष्णाय नमः	ॐ साधुविप्रप्रपूजकाय नमः	ॐ भक्तवत्सलाय नमः
ॐ घनश्यामाय नमः	ॐ अहिंसयज्ञप्रस्तोत्रे नमः	ॐ अरोषणाय नमः
ॐ धार्मिकाय नमः	ॐ साकारब्रह्मवर्णनाय नमः	ॐ दीर्घदर्शिने नमः
ॐ भक्तिनन्दनाय नमः	ॐ स्वामिनारायणाय नमः	ॐ षडूर्मिविजयक्षमाय नमः
ॐ बृहद्व्रतधराय नमः	ॐ स्वामिने नमः	ॐ निरहङ्कृतये नमः
ॐ शुद्धाय नमः	ॐ कोलदोषनिवारकाय नमः	ॐ अद्रोहाय नमः
ॐ राधाकृष्णोष्टदैवताय नमः	ॐ सच्छास्त्रव्यसनाय नमः	ॐ ऋजवे नमः
ॐ मरुत्पुत्रप्रियाय नमः	ॐ सद्यःसमाधिस्थितिकारकाय नमः	ॐ सर्वोपकारकाय नमः
ॐ कालीभैरवाद्यतिभीषणाय नमः	ॐ कृष्णार्चास्थापनकराय नमः	ॐ नियामकाय नमः
ॐ जितेन्द्रियाय नमः	ॐ कौलद्विषे नमः	ॐ उपशमस्थितये नमः
ॐ जिताहाराय नमः	ॐ कलितारकाय नमः	ॐ विनयवते नमः
ॐ तीव्रवैराग्याय नमः	ॐ प्रकाशरूपाय नमः	ॐ गुरवे नमः
ॐ आस्तिकाय नमः	ॐ निर्दम्भाय नमः	ॐ अजातवैरिणे नमः
ॐ योगेश्वराय नमः	ॐ सर्वजीवहितावहाय नमः	ॐ निर्लोभाय नमः
ॐ योगकलाप्रवृत्तये नमः	ॐ भक्तिसम्पोषकाय नमः	ॐ महापुरुषाय नमः
ॐ अतिधैर्यवते नमः	ॐ वाग्मिने नमः	ॐ आत्मदाय नमः
ॐ ज्ञानिने नमः	ॐ चतुर्वर्गफलप्रदाय नमः	ॐ अखण्डितार्थमर्यादाय नमः
ॐ परमहंसाय नमः	ॐ निर्मत्सराय नमः	ॐ व्याससिद्धान्तबोधकाय नमः
ॐ तीर्थकृते नमः	ॐ भक्तवर्मणे नमः	ॐ मनोनिग्रहयुक्तिज्ञाय नमः
ॐ तैर्थिकार्चिताय नमः	ॐ बुद्धिदात्रे नमः	ॐ यमदूतविमोचकाय नमः
ॐ क्षेमानिधये नमः	ॐ अतिपावनाय नमः	ॐ पूर्णकामाय नमः
ॐ सदोन्निद्राय नमः	ॐ अबुद्धिहते नमः	ॐ सत्यवादिने नमः
ॐ ध्याननिष्ठाय नमः	ॐ ब्रह्मधामदर्शकाय नमः	ॐ गुणग्राहिणे नमः
ॐ तपःप्रियाय नमः	ॐ अपराजिताय नमः	ॐ गतस्मयाय नमः
ॐ सिद्धेश्वराय नमः	ॐ आसमुद्रान्तसत्कीर्तये नमः	ॐ सदाचारप्रियतराय नमः
ॐ स्वतन्त्राय नमः	ॐ श्रितसंसृतिमोचनाय नमः	ॐ पुण्यश्रवणकीर्तनाय नमः
ॐ ब्रह्मविद्याप्रवर्तकाय नमः	ॐ उदाराय नमः	ॐ सर्वमङ्गलसद्गुणविचेष्टिताय नमः



20. Janmangal Nāmāvali Pāth

In the Bhagvad Gitā (10/25) Shri Krishna glorifies *japa yagna*: *yagnānām japayagno-smi* – of all the *yagnas*, chanting the divine name of Bhagwān is my excellent form. The Mahābhārat glorifies chanting the *Vishnusahastranām* – the 1008 names of Vishnu. Chanting all the names once is considered one *pāth*. In this manner, it is a common tradition in Sanātan Dharma to chant a prescribed number of *pāths* for the success of certain personal ventures, for solace from pain of chronic illnesses and other problems in life.

The choice of mantras rests on the individual's faith and mode of worship. They may include: *Gāyatri* mantra, *Hanumān Chālisā*, *Shiva stotras*, *Mrutyunjay mantra*, etc.

In the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, the most auspicious set of mantras is the *Janmangal Nāmāvali*. This comprises 108 divine names of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan composed by a Sanskrit scholar and paramhansa, Shatānand Swami. *Nāmāvali* means list of names. *Pāth* means chanting all the 108 names once (one set). Swami classifies ShriHari's (Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's) 108 names in the following manner:

Names:

- 1 to 9 describe ShriHari's divine form,
- 10 to 16 describe ShriHari's divine *charitras* at home during childhood,
- 17 to 42 describe His *charitras* during His *Kalyān Yātrā*,
- 43 to 108 describe Shri Hari's redemptive *charitras* during His remaining life of twenty-eight years, five months and twenty-seven days in the *Satsang*.

Prior to chanting the *Janmangal Pāth*, Shatānand Swami exhorts devotees in three shlokas, to: “meditate on Dharmanandan Shri Hari: who has a sublimely beautiful form like a *Naisthik Varni* (supreme celibate), has an exuberant smile and an attractive face and who has been offered *pujan* with *chandan* and flowers, and by *devas* and mankind.”

History

Some time during the third decade of the 19th century, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan instructed Shatānand Swami to

जनमंगल नामावली पाठ

Devotees of Bhagwān Venkateshwar Bālāji, at Tirumālā Devasthanam in Tirupati, recite his 108 divine names, known as Venkatesha Ashtottara Shata Nāmāvali.

compose a Sanskrit text known as the Satsangijivanam. Shatānand Swami composed it initially in two volumes, with three added later. This shāstra, of 360 chapters with 17,000 shlokas, detailed Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's divine episodes (*lilā*), His teachings, codes of conduct, vows, penances and details of festivals. However to read this once or chant one *pāth* would take about eighteen hours! Therefore Shatānand Swami decided to condense this in 1008 shlokas known as the *Sarvamangal Nāmāvali (stotras)*. These comprised 1008 divine names of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, which encompassed His *lilā charitras*, His teachings, etc. Swami felt contented that followers would be able to chant the *stotras* with ease. However this still took about one hour. Therefore, with foresight, for followers who would be pressured for time, he considered it prudent to condense the *Sarvamangal stotras* further. He then distilled their essence into the *Janmangal Nāmāvali / stotras*, whose one *pāth* takes about five minutes to chant.

Glory

In one of the several shlokas of glory preceding the *stotras*, Shatānand Swami proclaims:

|| *Nāmnāmashtottarashatam chaturvargamabhipsatām* ||
|| *Sadyaha falapradām nrunām tasya vakshyāmi satpatehe* ||

– this *stotra* has 108 names of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, who is the head of the sadhus. It will quickly fulfill all the four endeavours for devotees of, dharma (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (desires) and moksha (liberation).

Janmangal Nāmāvali

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ॐ श्री कृष्णाय नमः | 1. Om Shri Krishnāya namaha – I bow down to: One who attracts the mind of others (<i>'karshati iti Krishna'</i>). |
| ॐ श्री वासुदेवाय नमः | 2. Om Shri Vāsudevāya namaha – One who is 'Vāsudeva' – Supreme Paramātmā. |
| ॐ श्री नरनारायणाय नमः | 3. Om Shri Nar-Nārāyanāya namaha – One who is 'Nārāyan' – Supreme Paramātmā – and is with 'Nar' – His ideal devotee. |
| ॐ श्री प्रभवे नमः | 4. Om Shri Prabhava namaha – One who is the highest authority and power, and owner of everything. |
| ॐ श्री भक्तिधर्मात्मजाय नमः | 5. Om Shri Bhakti-Dharmātmajāya namaha – One who has incarnated as the son of Bhakti and Dharma. |



6. **Om Shri Ajanmane namaha** – One who is not subject to birth due to karmas. **ॐ श्री अजम्ने नमः**
7. **Om Shri Krishnāya namaha** – One who has a dark, attractive complexion. **ॐ श्री कृष्णाय नमः**
8. **Om Shri Nārāyanāya namaha** – One whom Rāmānand Swami named 'Nārāyan Muni' – meaning, the refuge for His devotees and support of everything. **ॐ श्री नारायणाय नमः**
9. **Om Shri Haraye namaha** – One who controls Brahmā and all other deities and destroys the miseries of His devotees who remember Him. **ॐ श्री हरये नमः**
10. **Om Shri Harikrishnāya namaha** – One who is 'Hari', meaning one who captivates the mind, and 'Krishna', meaning one who destroys the demons or the enemies of His devotees. **ॐ श्री हरिकृष्णाय नमः**
11. **Om Shri Ghanshyamāya namaha** – One who has a complexion like a dark cloud. **ॐ श्री घनश्यामाय नमः**
12. **Om Shri Dhārmikāya namaha** – One who observed dharma from childhood and is the son of Dharma (Dharmadeva). **ॐ श्री धार्मिकाय नमः**
13. **Om Shri Bhaktinandanāya namaha** – One who is the giver of bliss to Bhakti as her son. **ॐ श्री भक्तिनन्दनाय नमः**
14. **Om Shri Bruhadvratdharāya namaha** – One who has taken up and observes the great vow of brahmacharya. **ॐ श्री बृहद्व्रतधराय नमः**
15. **Om Shri Shuddhāya Namaha** – One who is Himself the incarnation of purity and is purifier of His devotees. **ॐ श्री शुद्धाय नमः**
16. **Om Shri Rādhā-Krishneshtadevatāya namaha** – One to whom Rādhā and Krishna are dear. **ॐ श्री राधाकृष्णोष्टदेवताय नमः**
17. **Om Shri Marutsutpriyāya namaha** – One who is the beloved of Hanumānji, the son of the wind deity. **ॐ श्री मरुत्सुतप्रियाय नमः**
18. **Om Shri Kālibhairavādyatibhishanāya namaha** – One who is serene, yet appears fierce to those like Kalibhairav, etc., who attempt to kill Him. **ॐ श्री कालीभैरवाद्यतिभीषणाय नमः**
19. **Om Shri Jitendriyāya namaha** – One who has complete control over His senses and helps others to attain such control. **ॐ श्री जितेन्द्रियाय नमः**
20. **Om Shri Jitāhārāya namaha** – One who has total control over His sense of taste and helps others to attain such control. **ॐ श्री जिताहाराय नमः**
21. **Om Shri Tivravairāgyāya namaha** – One who possesses highest *vairāgya* (detachment). **ॐ श्री तीव्रवैराग्याय नमः**

- ॐ श्री आस्तिकाय नमः 22. Om Shri Āstikāya namaha – One who inspires faith in Paramātmā.
- ॐ श्री योगेश्वराय नमः 23. Om Shri Yogeshvarāya namaha – One who is the Lord of the yogis, their sole aim and giver of (their) desired fruits.
- ॐ श्री योगकलाप्रवृत्तये नमः 24. Om Shri Yogakalāpravrutṭaye namaha – One who teaches His devotees all the steps of Yog.
- ॐ श्री अतिधैर्यवते नमः 25. Om Shri Atidhairyaṇvate namaha – One whose mind never gets defiled, who is extremely patient and undisturbed by outer influences.
- ॐ श्री ज्ञानिने नमः 26. Om Shri Gnānine namaha – One who has by His own Self realised the knowledge of *jiva*, *Ishvara*, *māyā*, Brahman and Parabrahman.
- ॐ श्री परमहंसाय नमः 27. Om Shri Paramhansāya namaha – One who is the greatest among the paramhansas.
- ॐ श्री तीर्थकृते नमः 28. Om Shri Tirthkrute namaha – One who creates *tirths*.
- ॐ श्री तैर्थिकार्चिताय नमः 29. Om Shri Tairthikārchitāya namaha – One who is worshipped by sadhus residing in *tirths*.
- ॐ श्री क्षमानिधये नमः 30. Om Shri Kshamānidhaye namaha – One who is an ocean of compassion, mercy and forgiveness.
- ॐ श्री सदोन्मिद्राय नमः 31. Om Shri Sadonnidrāya namaha – One who is eternally awake.
- ॐ श्री ध्याननिष्ठाया नमः 32. Om Shri Dhyānnishthāya namaha – One who is continuously engrossed in meditation on His own divine form.
- ॐ श्री तपःप्रियाय नमः 33. Om Shri Tapahpriyāya namaha – One who is fond of performing austerities and inspires others to perform them also.
- ॐ श्री सिद्धेश्वराय नमः 34. Om Shri Siddheshvarāya namaha – One who is worshipped as Paramātmā even by those who are accomplished in yog, austerities and spiritual wisdom.
- ॐ श्री स्वतन्त्राय नमः 35. Om Shri Svatantrāya namaha – One who is truly independent of all.
- ॐ ब्रह्मविद्याप्रवर्तकाय नमः 36. Om Shri Brahavidyā-pravartakāya namaha – One who spreads Brahavidyā (divine knowledge) to all.
- ॐ श्री पाषण्डोच्छेदनपटवे नमः 37. Om Shri Pāshandochhedanapatave namaha – One who intelligently defeats those who behave immorally by falsely interpreting the Vedas.
- ॐ श्री स्वस्वरूपाचलस्थितये नमः 38. Om Shri Svaswarupāchalasthitaye namaha – One who is steadfast in His own form.



39. **Om Shri Prashāntamurtaye namaha** – One who is totally calm and whose mere darshan brings peace to devotees. ॐ श्री प्रशान्तमूर्तये नमः
40. **Om Shri Nirdoshāya namaha** – One who is free of all defects and faults, such as ego, hypocrisy, greed, anger, etc. ॐ श्री निर्दोषाय नमः
41. **Om Shri Asuragurvādi-mohanāya namaha** – One who captivates even evil gurus by His divine actions. ॐ श्री असुरगुर्वादिमोहनाय नमः
42. **Om Shri Atikārūnyanayanāya namaha** – One whose eyes overflow with compassion. ॐ श्री अतिकारुण्यनयनाय नमः
43. **Om Shri Uddhavādhva-pravartakāya namaha** – One who spreads the teachings of the Uddhav sampradāya founded by Rāmānand Swami. ॐ श्री उद्धवाध्वप्रवर्तकाय नमः
44. **Om Shri Mahāvratāya namaha** – One who perfectly upholds the five great vows of *nishkāma* (non-lust), *nirlobh* (non-greed), *nisswād* (non-taste), *nissneh* (detachment) and *nirmān* (humility), and who performs severe austerities. ॐ श्री महाव्रताय नमः
45. **Om Shri Sādhushilāya namaha** – One whose behaviour perfectly reflects the character of a realised Sadhu. ॐ श्री साधुशीलाय नमः
46. **Om Shri Sādhuvipra-prapujakāya namaha** – One who honours sadhus and brahmins and inspires others to do the same. ॐ श्री साधुविप्रप्रपूजकाय नमः
47. **Om Shri Ahimsayagna-prastotre namaha** – One who established the tradition of non-violent *yagnas*. ॐ श्री अहिंसयज्ञप्रस्तोत्रे नमः
48. **Om Shri Sākārabrahma-varnanāya namaha** – One who spreads the understanding that Brahman and Parabrahman both have divine human forms. ॐ श्री साकारब्रह्मवर्णनाय नमः
49. **Om Shri Swāminārāyanāya namaha** – One who is 'Nārāyan' – the supreme Paramātmā – and is always with 'Swami' – Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami. ॐ श्री स्वामिनारायणाय नमः
50. **Om Shri Swāmine namaha** – One who is the Lord of all and protector of His bhaktas. ॐ श्री स्वामिने नमः
51. **Om Shri Kāladoshanivārakāya namaha** – One who destroys the bad effects of adverse time. ॐ श्री कालदोषनिवारकाय नमः
52. **Om Shri Satshāstravyasanāya namaha** – One who is addicted to reciting and listening to the *śāstras*. ॐ श्री सच्छास्त्रव्यसनाय नमः
53. **Om Shri Sadyasamādhi-sthītikārakāya namaha** – One who instantly grants the state of *samādhi* to His devotees, without their having to master the preceding seven limbs of Ashtāng Yog. ॐ श्री सद्यःसमाधिस्थितिकारकाय नमः

- ॐ श्री कृष्णार्चास्थापनकराय नमः 54. **Om Shri Krishnārchā-sthāpanakarāya namaha** – One who consecrates the *murtis* of Paramātmā in mandirs.
- ॐ श्री कौलद्विषे नमः 55. **Om Shri Kauladvishe namaha** – One who refutes with logical reasoning the Kaul cults, which preach unrighteousness and immorality.
- ॐ श्री कलितारकाय नमः 56. **Om Shri Kalitārakāya namaha** – One who protects His devotees along with their families from the influence of *Kaliyug* (the dark age).
- ॐ श्री प्रकाशरूपाय नमः 57. **Om Shri Prakāsharupāya namaha** – One who is eternally radiant and resides with His divine form in Akshardhām.
- ॐ श्री निर्दम्भाय नमः 58. **Om Shri Nirdambhāya namaha** – One who is totally free from pretence and hypocrisy.
- ॐ श्री सर्वजीवहितावहाय नमः 59. **Om Shri Sarvajivahitāvahāya namaha** – One who does good of all beings.
- ॐ श्री भक्तिसम्पोषकाय नमः 60. **Om Shri Bhaktisamposhakāya namaha** – One who has enriched and promoted the path of bhakti to Paramātmā.
- ॐ श्री वाग्मिने नमः 61. **Om Shri Vāgmīne namaha** – One who lovingly speaks the truths taught by the Vedas.
- ॐ श्री चतुर्वर्गफलप्रदाय नमः 62. **Om Shri Chaturvarga-falapradāya namaha** – One who bestows the fruits of the four endeavours: dharma (moral behaviour), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (desires) and moksha (liberation).
- ॐ श्री निर्मत्सराय नमः 63. **Om Shri Nirmatsarāya namaha** – One who is not envious of the progress of others, but rejoices in their success.
- ॐ श्री भक्तवर्मणे नमः 64. **Om Shri Bhaktavarmāne namaha** – One who is surrounded by countless devotees, whom He protects.
- ॐ श्री बुद्धिदात्रे नमः 65. **Om Shri Buddhidātre namaha** – One who bestows spiritual intellect to help devotees realise His true form.
- ॐ श्री अतिपावनाय नमः 66. **Om Shri Atipāvanāya namaha** – One who is absolutely pure and purifies others.
- ॐ श्री अबुद्धिहृते नमः 67. **Om Shri Abuddhihrute namaha** – One who destroys ignorance.
- ॐ श्री ब्रह्मधामदर्शकाय नमः 68. **Om Shri Brahmadhām-darshakāya namaha** – One who reveals His abode – Brahmadhām (Akshardhām) – to all His devotees.
- ॐ श्री अपराजिताय नमः 69. **Om Shri Aparājītāya namaha** – One who cannot be defeated by anyone, but is Himself won over by the selfless love of His devotees.



70. **Om Shri Āsamudrānta-satkirtaye namaha** – One whose fame is endless; spread beyond all the oceans. ॐ श्री आसमुद्रान्तसत्कीर्तये नमः
71. **Om Shri Shritasansruti-mochanāya namaha** – One who compassionately redeems His devotees from rebirth. ॐ श्री श्रितसंसृतिमोचनाय नमः
72. **Om Shri Udārāya namaha** – One who is extremely generous. ॐ श्री उदाराय नमः
73. **Om Shri Sahajānandāya namaha** – One who is naturally full of bliss and grants it to His devotees. ॐ श्री सहजानन्दाय नमः
74. **Om Shri Sādhvidharma-pravartakāya namaha** – One who propounds the dharma of His women disciples. ॐ श्री साध्वीधर्मप्रवर्तकाय नमः
75. **Om Shri Kandarpadarpa-dalanāya namaha** – One who crushed to pieces the ego of Kāmadeva – the deity of lust. ॐ श्री कन्दर्पदर्पदलनाय नमः
76. **Om Shri Vaishnavakratu-kārakāya namaha** – One who established the practice of *yagna* according to the true Vaishnava tradition. ॐ श्री वैष्णवक्रतुकारकाय नमः
77. **Om Shri Panchāyatana-sanmānāya namaha** – One who propounds the worshipfulness of the five deities (Vishnu, Shiva, Ganapati, Pārvati and Surya). ॐ श्री पंचायतनसम्मानाय नमः
78. **Om Shri Naishthikavrata-poshakāya namaha** – One who practises absolute *brahmacharya* and inspires others to do so. ॐ श्री नैष्ठिकव्रतपोषकाय नमः
79. **Om Shri Pragalbhāya namaha** – One who is ever eager to debate with great scholars. ॐ श्री प्रगल्भाय नमः
80. **Om Shri Nispruhāya namaha** – One who is detached from all material desires. ॐ श्री निःस्पृहाय नमः
81. **Om Shri Satyapratignāya namaha** – One who always keeps His promises. ॐ श्री सत्यप्रतिज्ञाय नमः
82. **Om Shri Bhaktavatsalāya namaha** – One who has infinite love for His followers. ॐ श्री भक्तवत्सलाय नमः
83. **Om Shri Aroshanāya namaha** – One who is free of anger. ॐ श्री अरोषणाय नमः
84. **Om Shri Dirghadarshine namaha** – One who has unparalleled foresight. ॐ श्री दीर्घदर्शिने नमः
85. **Om Shri Shadurmi-vijayakṣhamāya namaha** – One who has conquered the six physical and emotional sensations of thirst, hunger, grief, infatuation, old age and death. ॐ श्री षडूर्मिविजयक्षमाय नमः

- ॐ श्री निरहङ्कृतये नमः 86. **Om Shri Nirahankrutaye namaha** – One who is egoless and dissolves the ego of others.
- ॐ श्री अद्रोहाय नमः 87. **Om Shri Adrohāya namaha** – One who has no hatred nor maligns anyone.
- ॐ श्री ऋजवे नमः 88. **Om Shri Rujave namaha** – One who is soft-natured and without deceit.
- ॐ श्री सर्वोपकारकाय नमः 89. **Om Shri Sarvopakārakāya namaha** – One who obliges all without any expectation.
- ॐ श्री नियामकाय नमः 90. **Om Shri Niyāmakāya namahā** – One who controls everything.
- ॐ श्री उपशमस्थितये नमः 91. **Om Shri Upashamasthitaye namaha** – One who has attained complete peace and tranquility by having control over His senses.
- ॐ श्री विनयवते नमः 92. **Om Shri Vinayavate namaha** – One who is naturally humble and polite.
- ॐ श्री गुरवे नमः 93. **Om Shri Gurave namaha** – One who is the guru of Brahmā and all other deities whom He taught the Vedas and thus destroyed everyone's ignorance.
- ॐ श्री अजातवैरिणे नमः 94. **Om Shri Ajātvairine namaha** – One who has no enemies.
- ॐ श्री निर्लोभाय नमः 95. **Om Shri Nirlobhāya namaha** – One who has no greed or desire to hoard things.
- ॐ श्री महापुरुषाय नमः 96. **Om Shri Mahāpurushāya namaha** – One who is the greatest among all men and possesses the 32 virtues of the great.
- ॐ श्री आत्मदाय नमः 97. **Om Shri Ātmadāya namaha** – One gives His all, including His *Ātmā* (Aksharbrahman) to His devotees.
- ॐ श्री अखण्डितार्थमर्यादाय नमः 98. **Om Shri Akhanditārsha-maryādāya namaha** – One who never transgresses the moral codes prescribed by the rishis in the shāstras and neither does He allow His followers to transgress them.
- ॐ श्री व्याससिद्धान्तबोधकाय नमः 99. **Om Shri Vyāsasiddhānta-bodhakāya namaha** – One who sheds true light on the wisdom and principles taught by Veda Vyās.
- ॐ श्री मनोनिग्रहयुक्तिज्ञाय नमः 100. **Om Shri Manonigraha-yuktignāya namaha** – One who teaches His devotees techniques to control the mind.
- ॐ श्री यमदूतविमोचकाय नमः 101. **Om Shri Yamaduta-vimochakāya namaha** – One who saves His devotees from the clutches of Yama Rājā's attendants.
- ॐ श्री पूर्णकामाय नमः 102. **Om Shri Purnakāmāya namaha** – One who Himself is totally fulfilled and fulfills the desires of His devotees.



103. **Om Shri Satyavādine namaha** – One who always upholds and speaks the truth. ॐ श्री सत्यवादिने नमः
104. **Om Shri Gunagrāhine namaha** – One who always imbibes the virtues of others. ॐ श्री गुणग्राहिणे नमः
105. **Om Shri Gatasmayāya namaha** – One who is egoless. ॐ श्री गंतस्मयाय नमः
106. **Om Shri Sadāchāra-priyatarāya namaha** – One who is fond of pure and righteous living and inspires His followers to live similar lives. ॐ श्री सदाचारप्रियतराय नमः
107. **Om Shri Punyashravana-kirtanāya namaha** – One whose name and discourses are purifying by their very utterances. ॐ श्री पुण्यश्रवणकीर्तनाय नमः
108. **Om Shri Sarvamangala-sadrupa-nānā-guna-viśeṣhṣitāya namaha** – One whose divine form, divine virtues and divine *lilā* are auspicious and redemptive to all creatures. ॐ श्री सर्वमङ्गलसद्रूपनानागुणविशेषिताय नमः

Glory of chanting the Janmangal Nāmāvali

This is described in the six shlokas after the 108 names:

This *stotra* bestows happiness and redeems mankind. Therefore it is aptly named *Jan* – mankind, *mangal* – redemptive. One who chants it everyday receives the same fruit as that of chanting *Sarvamangal stotras*.

One who chants this *stotra* three times a day (morning, afternoon and evening), who devotionally and with faith listens to it being chanted, who chants it so others may listen, all his sins are wiped away from the root. The sins and causes of sins are also destroyed.

One who chants this *pāth* everyday attains the four endeavours of life – dharma, *artha*, *kāma* and moksha. By Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's grace, that which is unattainable is attained. The aspirant does not need to attain anything further.

By chanting ten thousand *Janmangal pāths*, any of the following evil afflictions and miseries are, without doubt, destroyed: ghosts, evil spirits, witches, *brahmarākshas* (type of ghost), demonesses which harm children, tantric curses, miseries caused by enemies, disease and any other physical ailments.

Both sadhus and householders should chant ten *pāths* everyday. This will bestow happiness and fulfil auspicious desires.

Shāstriji Mahārāj, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's third spiritual successor, often advised devotees to chant the Janmangal Pāth when beset with life's problems. Devotees did experience miraculous recoveries, gained spiritual fortitude or shānti at heart. Similarly, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj also extols Janmangal Nāmāvali's glory and advises devotees to chant as many pāths as possible, for succour and solace. In life's daily grind Janmangal Nāmāvali Pāth is a supremely effective de-stressor.

Part 3 – Home Rituals

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Introduction

The chapters in this section begin with the Vedic rituals that are performed on the site prior to building a house. After construction, there is an important ritual known as Vāstu puṇā, which renders the building a purity and sanctity fit for habitation.

In the house all Hindus usually have a home shrine, known as *ghar mandir*. This chapter discusses how a Hindu family generally offers worship in the *ghar mandir* as advocated by the *shāstras*, one's spiritual tradition and guru. Obviously, each tradition will have its own mode of worship rituals. However, the significant point to realise is that for Hindus, the *ghar mandir* is the central focus of the home, rather than the living room. The *ghar mandir* functions as a smaller representation of the main mandir in the town or city. It serves as the most vital part of the family's life, where spiritual traditions and nurture, known as *samskāras* are imparted and transmitted to the younger members.

The *ghar satsang sabhā* is the family's daily evening spiritual gathering. Pramukh Swami Mahārāj has introduced this ritual for BAPS followers. This chapter discusses the vital importance of all family members gathering together in the evening after switching off the T.V., and other electronic gadgets of entertainment.

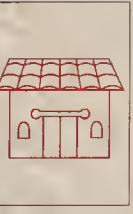
Padharāmani is a tradition common in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, in which sadhus visit homes of devotees on occasions such as Vāstu puṇā or to pray for a family member who is seriously ill or convalescing.

Bāl Samskāras is a section which offers guidance to young married people who are expecting children, or who already have young children and wish to know details about imparting *samskāras*. This is especially relevant to those couples who do not have their parents living with them. Ideally it would be prudent to have grandparents at home or living nearby, for they can look after the children during the day, while the parents are at work. Grandparents are the most important source of *samskāras*, knowledge and wisdom about traditions and customs.



grandfather teaching grandson how to make garlands





21. Shilānyās (foundation-stone laying ritual)

- Mārjanam
- Khāta Devatā pujan

Shilā means brick. *Shilānyās* ritual is the laying of bricks in the foundation of building or mandir in the manner prescribed in the *shāstras*.

A few days prior to the *shilānyās* ritual, *bhumi pujan* is performed on the area of land prior to construction of a building. Before construction can begin, that piece of land needs to be purified, to cleanse any of the following evil influences or past events: earthquake, pestilence, bones and other impure materials, presence of evil spirits, past residence of evil people and *himsā* in the form of battles. The effect of evil land on people is tenable. A well known example is of Shravan, the boy who devotedly carried his aged parents on a pilgrimage. Once he stopped suddenly at a place and refused to carry them further. Gleaning the cause, his father requested him to carry them some distance further before discontinuing the pilgrimage. After some time they stopped. The evil patch had passed. Shravan came to his senses and changed his mind. Hence the importance of performing *bhumi pujan*. This is performed by chanting *shānti pāth* and sprinkling sanctified water and flower petals on the site. This is followed by the *shilānyās* ritual.

The *shilānyās* ritual is the laying of the first bricks in a hollow, dug of specified dimensions and shape. This hollow is known as *gerta* (Sans.). The whole ritual is usually performed within this *gerta*. Since the earth is revered as *mātā* – mother – in Sanātan Dharma, her permission is first sought before digging the *gerta*. This is done by performing her *pujan*. However practically, the *gerta* is dug first, with another smaller hollow at its deep end, measuring 1.5 by 1.0 feet.

The sequence of rites performed with their appropriate Vedic mantras, is as follows:

- *mangalācharan* – auspicious initiation.
- *shāntipāth* – peace chant.
- *pujan* of Ishtadeva – worship of one's personal Deity.
- *pujan* of participants with kumkum and rice and tying the *nādā chhadi*.

शिलान्यास



gerta



nidhikumbh laid in the gerta

opp. page: Mahāpujā and khāt ritual prior to shilānyās



pujan of golden Kurma, Nāg and other devatās during shilānyās of Swāminārāyan Akshardhām, New Delhi. Dt. 8-11-2000

- *devābhivandan* – honouring and invoking all other deities.
- This is followed by: *pradhān sankalp*, worship of the deities of the ten directions and *nyāsvidhi*.
- *pujan* of the *nidhikumbh* (pot) that is to be buried in the *gerta* (*nidhi* means treasure trove).
- *prārthnā* and *vandan* of the *nidhikumbh*.

Mārjanam

Mārjanam means to purify by sprinkling sanctified water. A small amount of the sanctified water from the *kumbha* is used for the remaining rites.

The following are then invoked and offered *pujan*: Ishtadeva, Ganpati, *deep* (*divo*), *shankh* (conch-shell), *ghant* (bell) and *Suryadeva* (Sun deity). Then follows *pujan* of the *khātadevatā* – deities of the *khāta* ritual.

Khātadevatā pujan

In Sanātan Dharma's belief, when a demon 'earthnapped', all the land and hid it in the ocean, the *Varāha* (boar) avatār incarnated. With its acute sense of smell it sought out the earth. Therefore, the first *Khātadevatā* to be offered *pujan* is *Varāha*.

This is followed by *pujan* of *Kurma* (tortoise) avatār. This is because during *Samudra Manthan*, Kurma supported Vindhyačhal mountain on its back. Therefore symbolically, to keep the earth stable, it is offered *pujan*.

Next, *Anantadeva* (*Shesha Nāg*) is offered *pujan*, since it supports the whole earth on its head. This is followed by *pujan* of *Pruthvi mātā* – mother earth, on whom the construction is going to be performed. For future happiness and harmony, the *Vāstu Purush* (see details of *Vāstu Purush* in Ch.22) is invoked and offered *pujan*, followed by *pujan* of all other deities. Then every deity is offered *stuti* (prayer). *Pujan* is then performed of five unbaked bricks, representing all materials to be used in constructing the building.

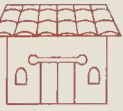
Next the pundit performs *pujan* with rice and kumkum of all people involved in the construction of the building, such as: the owner, *Sompurā* (traditional stone architect), sculptors, masons and labourers.



six Khāta deities



pujan of five bricks



The six *Khāta* deities invoked earlier, are then invoked in the *nidhikumbh*. Its mouth is covered either with a betel leaf or cloth and tied with a *nādā chhadi*.

Next *pujan* is performed of the *gerta*. The *nidhikumbh* is then placed in the small hollow at the deep end of the *gerta* (photo 1). Four bricks are placed around it in the following directions: *agni*, *vāyavya*, *nairutya*, *ishān* (photo 3). The fifth brick is placed on top of the *nidhikumbh* (photo 4).

Then a slurry of cement and mortar is poured over this, followed by sanctified water used during the rite (photos 5,6). The hollow is then filled up with earth, followed by more water.

The *shilānyās* ritual ends with prayer and *ār̥ti*, and *prasād* is distributed to everybody present. The construction can then begin full scale.



nidhikumbh

Shilānyās ritual sequence



1. placing the *nidhikumbh*



2. *nidhikumbh* in place



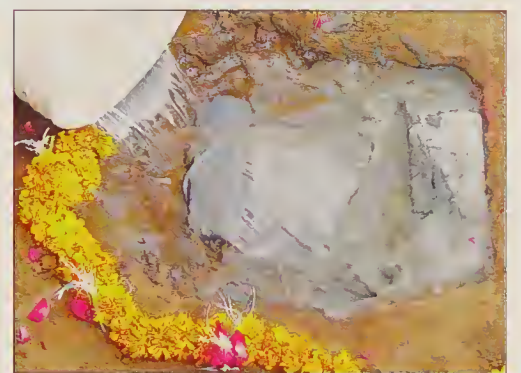
3. laying 4 bricks then 5th on top



4. *pujan* with *panchāmrut*



5. covering with cement & mortar



6. pouring water in *gerta*



end of *pujā* rituals



prasād of coriander seeds & jaggery



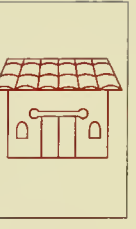
prasād of *pendā* (milk sweet)

Rog	Nāg	Mukhya	Bhallāt	Kuber	Shail	Aditi	Diti	Ish
Pāpaya kshamā	Rudra		Pruthvidhar			Āpavatsa	Parjanya	
Shesh	Rudradas					Āp	Jay	
Asur								Indra
Varun	Maitragan		Brahmā			Aryamā		Surya
Pushpa- dant								Satya
Sugriv	Jay		Vaivasvat			Sāvitra		Bhrush
Nandi	Indra					Savitā		Ākāsh
Pitru	Mrug	Mrugrāj	Gandharva	Yam	Gruha- kshata	Vitatha	Pushā	Agni

22. Vāstu Pujā (Home inauguration)

- Origin of Vāstu
- Vāstu pujā ritual
- Sankalp
- Dhruva pujā
- Gruha pravesha (entering the house)

वास्तु पूजा



The word *vāstu* is derived from the Sanskrit root *vas* meaning ‘to dwell’ (*vasavāt*). Therefore *vāstu* means ‘the place where people dwell.’ This place may either be home, land or any other building. Another concept of *vāstu* is *vasatu iti vāstu* meaning ‘that which exists.’

Vāstu pujā is the ritual of worship performed in a newly constructed or purchased house (or business office), before moving in for the first time. It is performed to prevent any obstacles for the residents and for *shānti*.

Origin of Vāstu

In the Rāmāyan (Ayodhyākāṇḍ 56 & Āraṇyakāṇḍ 15) Shri Rāma describes the efficiency of *Vāstu* and *Vāstu pujā* to Lakshman:

Kartavyam vāstushamaham saumitrie chirjivibhi

– this *vāstu pujā* has to be performed by those who wish to live long.

Forty-five deities, beginning with Agni, *parjanya*, etc., are invoked to occupy the house. In his *Gruhyasutras*, Baudhāyan rishi advocates propitiating these deities with *havana* (yagna), offerings, etc. This has to be performed by everyone while entering the new house to have a long and happy life.

The saviour who protects the dwelling is termed *vāstos-pati* – *Vāstu Purush*. The *Vāstu purush* – space personified – plays a vital role in *Vāstu shāstra*. There are many stories regarding *Vāstu Purush*. According to Matsya Purāna, Shiva and a demon name Andhak fought for years. After killing the demon, a drop of Shiva’s sweat fell on earth, from which a black and ugly looking human appeared. Being very hungry, he drank Andhak’s blood. Still very hungry, he performed *tapas* to please Shiva. The latter granted a boon to eat all three *loks*: *bhulok*, *devalok* and *pātāl lok*. Immediately, he started eating all three *loks*. Frightened by this, all humans,



coconut cracked on the doorstep
during *gruha pravesha*

opp. page: the *Vāstu Purush* is perceived as a male figure tightly coiled into the grid of the *Mandukapadam*

deities and demons ran to Brahmā. Brahmā advised them, ‘In order to stop him, throw him on the ground, turn him upside down, and sit on each part of his body. The deities obeyed Brahmā’s instructions and sat themselves on that human’s body. Favours the deities, Brahmā himself set in the middle of the grounded body. This human begged Brahmā for freedom. Brahmā gave him a boon that, ‘Whoever will not perform vāstu ritual will become your food. And all works on the earth will have to be commenced and concluded only after propitiating you.’

This being, called the *Vāstu Purush*, is the guardian of the building .

Vāstu puṇā ritual

Vāstu puṇā begins with the following rites and Vedic mantras: *mangalācharan*, *āchaman*, *prānāyāma*, *shānti pāth* (peace prayer).

Next, *pujan* of all the participants is performed with kumkum *chāndlo* and rice on the forehead and *nādā chhadi* tied on the wrist. One’s Ishtadeva and other deities are worshipped by *stuti* (prayer) and *vandan* (humble *pranāms*) for the completion of the *pujan* without hindrance.

Sankalp

The next important rite is *sankalp*. In this, sentiments of forgiveness are uttered: (i) to nullify any sin incurred from organisms that may have died during digging and construction, and (ii) to nullify any discord (*ashānti*) resulting from that sin. Sentiments are also offered for: increase in one’s wealth and grain (food), for the prevalence of health and unity and harmony among all those who live in the house.

The participants then meditate upon the *Vāstu Purush*, offer him *stuti*, invoke (*āhawān*) and establish him (*sthāpan*) in the *puṇā*, while the pundit chants the appropriate mantras from the Vedas and other *shāstras*.

Dhruva puṇā

This forms the third part of *Vāstu puṇā*. *Dhruva puṇā* is for stability in life. In this: Dhruva deva is invoked, established, offered *pujan* and *prārthnā*. The *prārthnā*, again, is for forgiveness for sin incurred in the accidental destruction of any plants and organisms during construction. Forgiveness



In south India, the wood of the jackfruit tree (*Artocarpus integrifolia*) is considered so scared that at least one doorframe in a new house is made of this wood



in some communities *Vāstu puṇā* takes the form of *havan*, which is a small scale *yagna* inside the new home, lasting several hours



is also sought for any mistakes incurred through ignorance or laxity during the whole *pujā* ritual.

Gruha pravesh (entering the house)

After completion of the above *pujā* ritual, all participants step outside the house. Often the above ritual is performed a few days earlier and the actual *gruha pravesh* – house entry – is arranged later.

Followers of BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya usually invite sadhus to perform both *Vāstu pujā* and *gruha pravesh*. The sadhus and the house owner stand at the main doorway. While chanting *shānti pāth*, the sadhus imprint kumkum *chāndlo* on the doorframe, known as *dwārsākh*; with five spots on the left and right frames – signifying Gangā and Yamunā, respectively. The sentiments are that the family's happiness and wealth flow incessantly like the two sacred rivers. On the top horizontal frame, a swastik is imprinted with kumkum, symbolically offering *pujan* to all other deities. Along with the five spots, it is customary to write (in vernacular) *shubh* and *lābh*, on the left and right walls of the door frames, respectively. The swastik may also be imprinted besides this.

The Vāstu Purush is again offered *pujan* symbolically by imprinting a swastik on the entrance floor, as seen in the photo on the right.

Either *shānti pāth* or *Janmangal Nāmāvali Pāth* (see Ch.20) is chanted during this ritual. While chanting, a *shrifal* (coconut) is also offered *pujan*, then smashed on the entrance floor. The coconut milk is sprinkled inside and overhead for auspiciousness.

The sadhu with Thākorji (Bhagwān's *chal murti*) then steps inside, right foot first. The rest of the people follow. The sadhus then sprinkle sacred water and sanctified flower petals inside all the rooms, while chanting *shānti pāth*. The traditional *prasād* of *Vāstu pujā* is jaggery and coriander seeds, which is offered to everybody. People generally also offer *pendā*, fruits and dried fruits and nuts.

This ends *Gruha pravesh* and *Vāstu pujā*. The house is now purified of any evil influence and sanctified by Bhagwān's *pujā*. The family can then move in.



dwārsākh pujan

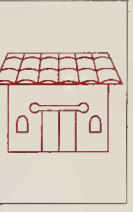


swastik and shubh – lābh



coconut cracked on the entrance floor





23. Ghar Mandir (Home shrine)

घर मंदिर

- Ghar mandir
- Functions of a ghar mandir
- Location of the ghar mandir
- Maintaining purity of the ghar mandir
- *Murtis* in the ghar mandir
- Pramukh Swami Mahārāj on the ghar mandir

Ghar mandir

Ghar is a Gujarati word for a house, a home.

Every individual has a soft corner for his own home even if it is just a ramshackle cabin. In India at least, when a relative comes home, or if someone important visits us, we go to great pains in running around to make his visit memorable. What if Paramātmā Himself pays us a visit? What if Paramātmā agrees to live with us permanently? Then our joy would know no bounds. Paramātmā's residence in our home is known as a *Ghar mandir*.

Functions of a ghar mandir

In the Yog Darshan shāstra, Patanjali rishi has described the effects of being in the vicinity of an Ashtāng Yogi:

Tatsannidhāne vairatyāgaha

– in his presence the instinct of violence in any living being subsides. A lion or tiger will behave as tamely as a house dog.

Then what to talk of the Yogi of all yogis, the beholder of all Yogis – Paramātmā? Surely His presence in the *ghar mandir* will gradually lessen the base instincts of an individual. The whole atmosphere is transformed into a devotional one, filled with pious thoughts. One is inspired to imbibe these thoughts in one's life. Detrimental influences of electronic gadgets like television will not affect this atmosphere. Noble thoughts arise in children. Their faith in Paramātmā increases and seeds are sown for their character development. To a greater or lesser extent, sooner or later, the *ghar mandir* will invariably inspire each individual in the home. Thus, Paramātmā's residence in the home also renders it into a mandir.

opp. page: young devotee praying in the home shrine

It is necessary to have a *ghar* mandir for the following reasons:

- to increase cultural values
- to deepen one's bhakti and service to Paramātmā
- to discourage malevolent thoughts and immoral behaviour

To prevent a quarrelsome atmosphere and turn it into a pure one such as a Mandir's*, it is necessary to have a *ghar* mandir. When an elderly person like a grandparent is present at home, everyone's behaviour changes for the better. His/her presence smoothen the daily affairs in the home. So naturally, if the supreme Purushottam Nārāyan Himself lives in the home, then one is freed from all worries. He shoulders all the worries.

Everyone may not get a chance to perform puṇā of Paramātmā's *murtis* at the Mandir. But at home, even His *shodshopchār puṇā* can be personally availed of. The auspicious environment of the Mandir is thus created at home.

Choosing a location for the ghar mandir

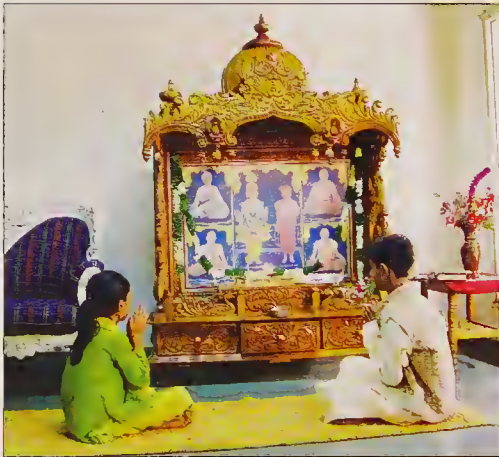
When our favourite sports personality visits us, where will we seat him? In the grand living room or the scullery? Be it a celebrity or a close friend, we will go out of our way to clean and decorate the house, the front garden; and spray air freshener in the rooms as well. We offer him a comfortable seat. We offer the most sumptuous food dishes. The same hospitality would be in order for our beloved Paramātmā. We would not for a moment think of offering Him a place under the staircase or a cupboard or a recess behind the kitchen door! Yet people do.

If the house is large, even a special room could be set aside for the *Ghar mandir* and the daily puṇā. In a small house with restricted space, the *Ghar mandir* should be positioned in a prominent place in the main room in full view of everyone to facilitate darshan.

Maintaining the purity of the ghar mandir

The common saying, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" is especially apt for the *Ghar mandir*. It should be kept clean, free of odds and ends. During their visits to people's homes, sadhus often see some of the items that are deposited here: torn *murtis*, coins, matchboxes, cotton, tissue packets, combs,

*Mandir -- with capital M here denotes a shikharbaddh or Hari mandir.



praying before the ghar mandir



burnt wicks, ashes of incense sticks, broken *kanthis* and *mālās*, old postcards, and so on! (see image on p.193) The *Ghar mandir* should be kept clean. The *pujā* paraphernalia like the *ārti* and *divā* stand, should be washed everyday. The incense and *divā* ashes should also be cleared daily. The remaining *pujā* paraphernalia should then be stored in a drawer nearby to give the deities some breathing space! Ideally, one should have a bath or at least wash one's hands and feet before touching the *Ghar mandir*. There should not be any footwear near it or in the room.

The family member who performs *ārti* and offers *prasād* to the deities should, if possible, have a bath beforehand. Slippers or shoes should not be worn while offering.

Murtis in the ghar mandir

The wise rishis enjoin consecration of *chal* (mobile) *murtis* in homes and *achal* (immovable) in mandirs:

*Gruhe chalārchā vijneyā prāsāde sthirasanjnikā
ityete kathitā mārgā munibhihi karmavādibhihi*

– Laugakshibhaskar

– one should keep in the ghar mandir *murtis* ranging from the size of a thumb to six inches. A *pratimā* larger than this is not auspicious in a house (Matsya Purāna 258/22).

*Ārambhyai kāngulādurdhvam paryantaikādashāngulam
gruheshu pratimā puḡyā nādhikā shasyate tatah.*

– Shilparatnākar (11/10)

– in the ghar mandir, one should worship *murtis* of size from one finger in height to eleven fingers. *Murtis* larger than this should not be worshipped.

One should not worship *murtis* in the ghar mandir which are damaged, bent, torn, partly burnt or without an eye or head. This augurs inauspiciousness to the owner (Varāh Purāna 186/43, Nārada Purāna, Purva 67/32-33).

Murtis in BAPS ghar mandir

The *murtis* should be the same as those in one's *nitya puḡā* – that of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and the *Gunātī paramīparā*. Portraits, half *murtis* and torn *murtis* should not be placed in the ghar mandir.

There is also an increasing appeal for BAPS devotees to consecrate marble *murtis* of about 1.5 feet, of Akshar and Purushottam in the *ghar mandir*. These *murtis* are sanctified by a senior sadhu, who first performs their *pujan*, in the nearest *shikharbaddh* mandir.

Pramukh Swami Mahārāj on the ghar mandir

‘One should sit in front of the Ghar mandir every morning to think about the ātmā. The mandir stills the mind. Only after doing nitya pujā, ārti and thāl, should one begin the day’s activities. The food one cooks should be offered first to Paramātmā in the ghar mandir. We are placing great emphasis on the ghar mandir because; just as we would like to live in a house, Paramātmā would also like to have His own house – in our homes. With Paramātmā ever present in the home, He will keep a loving vigil over our activities. Once the ghar mandir is consecrated, a chaitanya mandir (of the heart) will soon follow.’

•

‘Bhagwān Swāminārāyan has ordained all bhaktas in the Shikshāpatri (verse 63) to visit the Mandir every evening. If we live afar, and cannot visit it everyday, then we would receive equal fruits by devotedly performing ārti, thāl and ghar sabhā in the ghar mandir. By having a ghar mandir, one is in contact with Paramātmā everyday. The ghar mandir’s presence should not obviate the need for one’s personal nitya pujā. If we leave home, even for a few days, we should take the nitya pujā just as we do our tooth-brush and shaving kit. Regularity is the key. No matter how trivial an injunction may be, it should still be observed sincerely, with regularity. Paramātmā will manifest Himself in the home, in the heart, in the family and in the ātmā, to those who keep a ghar mandir.’



offering naivedya (thāl) in the ghar mandir



FAQs

1. Why is the ash of burnt incense (*agarbatti*) in ghar mandirs, usually sprinkled in a river or water body, rather than disposing it with garbage?

Not only ash, but any other used offerings such as flower garlands, torn or broken images and used clay *murtis*. This is to prevent them being defiled in a garbage heap by the feet, saliva or excretions of man, bird or animal. In a water body, which is regarded as holy, ash settles down, while flowers, paper and clay images of Ganeshji (during Ganesh *visarjan*) or Saraswati (after *visarjan* of Saraswati during Vasant Panchmi), are bio-degraded naturally.

2. In which direction should a ghar mandir be located in a new house?

The *shāstras* enjoin the north or east direction. However, if the construction of the rooms does not comfortably allow a mandir to fit in these directions, then one should ask one's spiritual guru or brahmin pundit to show an alternative. One's *bhakti* and worship is not rendered fruitless by choosing another direction, as is often believed by people who strictly wish to follow the rules of *Vāstu*.

3. What should a family do if it is unable to afford a ghar mandir?

Such families can improvise by hanging Bhagwān's laminated *murti* on a wall (see photo). The *pujā* paraphernalia can be stored in a drawer nearby.

Also, many such poverty-stricken families usually only have one cooked meal a day, nor can they afford to keep a separate tin of pure (home-made) snacks and sweet for *Thākorji*. Such families may offer their loving *bhāv* – sentiments by offering a teaspoonful of jaggery or sugar or just a glass of clean water.

Ultimately, according to Shri Krishna Bhagwān, he accepts anything offered with purity of heart and *bhakti* (Gītā 9/26).



agarbatti ashes & burnt wick in a ghar mandir





24. Ghar Satsang Sabhā

(Home spiritual discourse)

- Ghar satsang sabhā
- Holding a ghar sabhā
- Benefits of ghar sabhā
- Pramukh Swami Mahārāj on ghar sabhā

Ghar satsang sabhā

In Gujarati *ghar* means a house, a home. The *ghar satsang sabhā* is a spiritual discourse held in the evening after dinner, attended by all family members. Pramukh Swami Mahārāj introduced this home ritual in the BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā in the early 1970s.

Ghar satsang sabhā is a ‘handloom’ which brings together the threads of familial love, by understanding and knowledge; and weaves them to create a strong family fabric.

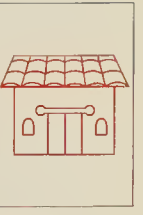
This fabric is prone to tearing in today’s high tech and ‘me first’ mode of living. Man’s life and his interactions with relatives and friends are not based on intellectualism alone. They are also influenced by love and emotions. These are two vital factors that hold a family together. These common bonds constitute a family. Without love, a person becomes self-centred and loses his ability to tolerate the minor foibles of family members. *Ghar sabhā*, short for *ghar satsang sabhā*, infuses such love. It is a bridge of love between individual members of the family.

Holding a ghar sabhā

The *ghar sabhā* should preferably be held in the evening after *ārti*, *thāl* and dinner. It should last for at least 20 minutes. Discuss the duration with all family members. The *sabhā* can be held as follows:

- *dhun* – chanting the mantra of one’s Ishtadeva – 2 minutes,
- bhajan – 4 minutes,
- reading and discussing a shāstra or satsang literature – 15 minutes.

With time, and as the family members become more interested and involved, the duration could be increased to 30 minutes or an hour. The religious literature should be light reading. This can include short stories from the Rāmāyan, Mahābhārat, Upanishads, Panch Tantra, Shrimad Bhāgavatam



घर सत्संग सभा



opp. page: a family elder explaining a sacred text during ghar sabhā



and stories of rishis, sadhus and bhaktas. BAPS followers can also include: *The Parables of Yogiji Mahārāj*, *Satsang Kathās of Yogiji Mahārāj*, *Satsang Shikshan* examination booklets, the life histories of the Gunātī paramparā, and *Swāmini Vāto*. To involve children in the *ghar sabhā*, they can be guided to sing *dhm*, bhajans or to read simple booklets such as *Ghanshyām Charitra*, *Neelkanth Charitra* and so forth.

Benefits of ghar sabhā

Ghar sabhā strengthens family ties, especially today, when working parents may not have time to sit with their children.

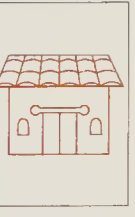
Ghar sabhā is the *satsang sabhā* of the whole family. *Satsang* moulds the individual. *Ghar sabhā* sows the seeds of morality and teaches members to look within, to look at one's faults and to imbibe only the virtues of others. *Ghar sabhā* nullifies the *kusang* (bad effects) of newspapers, T.V., internet and other electronic entertainment gadgets in the house. It instills in children *vivek* – the ability to discriminate between the good and bad, regarding the above devices. *Ghar sabhā* confers on the young members, self-esteem, a feeling of belonging, to be a fibre of the family fabric.

Devotion to Paramātmā increases. One develops humility. When such a 'satsang Gangā' flows at one's doorstep, even the home becomes a *tirth* (sacred place). *Ghar sabhā* is the 'Gangā' that converts a house into a *tirth*. *Ghar sabhā* also transforms a ghar into a *ghar mandir*.

Also, lack of daily conversations with one's spouse can gradually lead to marriage problems. *Ghar sabhā* is an opportunity for all family members to get together and discuss family problems as well. It gives cohesive support to the whole family. Sociologists call this, 'Social Connectedness,' which is related to individual health as well.

Health benefits

Research has shown that, the greater the Social Connectedness, the healthier the individual. A study of Japanese migrants settling in California showed that those who adopted western patterns of living (diet, smoking, relationships, etc.), showed rates of heart disease similar to their American neighbours. But a subgroup of the Japanese migrants had very low rates of heart disease, rates similar to those of their countrymen back in Japan. The researchers, Marmot and Syme noticed that members of this subgroup



lived a traditional Japanese life which has social stability and emphasizes strong social ties (Ornstein 1988:125).

When family members get together, as they may do in extended families, the health of individual members is maintained, and if a member is ill, then healing occurs. Dr. Harold Wise, calls this ‘therapeutic family reunion’. He believes that a great potential for healing exists in the family. He says, ‘for a million years people have lived in families and only in the last hundred years or so have people split up... the oldest healing form, in tribal medicine, involved bringing the whole clan together and working things through...’. But he adds a little dishearteningly, ‘What I’m saying doesn’t click in most people’s heads in 20th century America!’

In *The Healing Brain*, Robert Ornstein and David Sobel reveal that, “Social support appears to offer a stability which protects people in times of transition and stress (1988:126).”

The forms of social support cited by them include: intimate relationships with family and friends and memberships in religious and other community organisations. *Ghar sabhā* is an example of the former and the weekly *satsang sabhā*, an example of the latter.

Case Stories

‘While reading the *satsang* literature during *ghar sabhā*, my wife once requested that she’d like to study Gujarati. This is because being illiterate, she had to wait till the next day’s *ghar sabhā* to listen to the news in *Swāminārāyan Prakāsh* and stories from the *satsang* literature. She then began to study Gujarati from my son and daughter! The kids taught their mother! In just two months, she learnt to read and write. She became literate through the *Ghar sabhā*.’

– Shantibhai Patel (Jamnagar, Gujarat).

‘A woman in our village was so distraught by her spoiled son’s unruly nature, that she once dropped in during *ghar sabhā* and wept. We had to do something. So we requested her son to attend our *ghar sabhā*. Gradually the boy began to take interest in *satsang*, gave up liquor and other bad habits. Amazingly, just by his transformation, many of his friends also improved their ways.’

– Ashok Brahmabhatt (Vatāv, Dist. Petlād, Gujarat).

(Source: *Swāminārāyan Prakāsh*, April 2007).

*Pramukh Swami Mahārāj on
Ghar sabhā*

‘In the past, even parents used to tell stories from the Rāmāyan and Mahābhārat. Religious education given in schools enabled religious samskāras to be imparted to the children. In today’s environment, the parents do not care, neither is religion taught in school. So such education will not be provided outside the home environment. Therefore it is necessary for such samskāras to be received at home. That is why the ghar sabhā is needed. Children will be influenced by the environment they are brought up in. A satsang environment at home will mould children well. A holy atmosphere will prevail in the home and in society.

Ghar sabhā inspires and consolidates family bonds. In today’s atmosphere of materialism, each individual will come home to eat and sleep at his leisure and so family members do not meet each other. Views will differ and quarrels occur at every instant. So how can there be love and unity in the family?

It is not that all the family members cannot get together, but it is because we are not so resolved about doing it. If occasionally nobody comes, then one should hold the sabhā alone.’ (see also p.206)





25. Padharāmani (Home visits by sadhus)

A tradition prevails in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya in which the sadhus visit homes of householders. This is known as *padharāmani*. Originally established by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, the ritual remains vibrant. Pramukh Swami Mahārāj has performed over 250,000 *padharāmanis* during his life until failing health in his seventies.

पधरामणी

Occasions

The sadhus perform *padharāmani* with the *murti* of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and the *guru paramparā*, on the following occasions:

1. After Annakut, to distribute the Annakut *prasād* – to all devotees.
2. During the Makar Sankrānti *parva* – January 14th, also known as *jodi parva*, to beg alms. Standing at the doorway, the sadhus hail, ‘Nārāyan Hare Satchidānand Prabho!’ Devotees then eagerly fill their *jodis* (alms bags) with grain.

In both 1 & 2 above, two sadhus visit the homes, from about 7 am. to 11.30 pm. The same routine is repeated in subsequent days, until every family in the area allocated, has been visited. In the few minutes that elapse during the visit, the sadhus traditionally sing Premānand Swami’s bhajans known as *Ordānā padas*:

॥ *Āj māre orde re āwiā Avināshi albel...* ॥

– today the Indestructible One (Paramātmā) has come to my home.

Welcoming Paramātmā by singing His glory, the lyrics convey the devotee’s jubilation. The sadhus also inquire about their welfare and satsang and chant *dhun* for their well being. These personal visits are highly revered by devotees.

3. To perform *mahāpujā* to inaugurate and sanctify a new house or business premises (see Ch.5). This ‘*padharāmani*’ may last from 1.5 to 2 hours. The sadhus also perform *pujan* of all the other rooms, halls or machines, as the case may be. The devotee offers *pujan* to Paramātmā and the sadhus. The latter also imprint *chāndlo* on the foreheads of everybody present.

4. To offer Thākorji food cooked by the devotee in a new house, and avail a meal. This is known as *Thākorji*

opp. page: Pramukh Swami Mahārāj visiting an Adivasi devotee’s house in the Panch Mahals.



*Pramukh Swami Mahārāj
visiting poor devotees in villages
in the early 1970s*

jamādwā in Gujarati. The Satsangijivanam (4.99.31) enjoins that a minimum of five sadhus grace the home on such a visit.

5. To visit a devotee who is extremely ill either at home or in hospital; to boost him by praying for his recovery, by chanting the ‘Swāminārāyan’ mantra for a few minutes.

6. To perform the *antyeshti* rites of a male devotee (see p.316). The sadhus garland the deceased, imprint *chāndlo*, place a new *kanthi* around his neck and perform *ārti*. They then do five *pradakshinās* of the body, simultaneously chanting the Swāminārāyan mantra. The sadhus also solace the family members.

In its varied forms, the *padharāmani* tremendously boosts and consolidates the spiritual fervour of followers. It is both a unique tradition and a ritual in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya.

*devotees jubilantly welcoming
Thākorji (Bhagwān) and sadhus
during padharāmani*



Bhakti rituals during padharāmani



welcoming Thākorji & sadhus



ladies members preparing offerings for Thākorji



pujan of Thākorji



pujan of sadhus



Thākorji's ārti



offerings



receiving blessings & prasadam



praying for the family's welfare

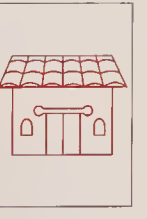


donation to Thākorji



sadhus with Thākorji performing padharāmani in a new shop





26. Bāl Samskāras (Child nurture)

- Example better than advice
- Importance of vernacular
- Pramukh Swami Mahārāj's sentiments on *bāl samskāras*

बाल संस्कार

Example better than advice

Primarily, it behoves parents to first introspect about their own thoughts and practice.

The thoughts and practice of parents are literally passed on to the offspring through blood. The rishis decreed that the parents' character should be pure even before the birth of the children.

In the Rāmāyan, Bhagwān Shri Rāma asks Lakshman:

*Pushpam drushtwā falam drushtwā, drushtwā strinām cha yauwanam
Trini rupāni drushtwaiwa kasya no chalate manaha*

– whose mind is not deflected on seeing a flower, a fruit and a beautiful woman?

Lakshman answers:

*Pitā yasya shoochirbhuto mātā yasya pativratā
Oobhābhyāmewa sambhutastasya no chalate manaha*

– an individual who is brought up by a father who is pure, and a mother who is chaste, his mind will not be deflected (on seeing the above three forms).

The thoughts, character and behaviour of the mother affect the foetus. It is well known that Prahlād and Shukdevaji obtained their spiritual samskāras in the womb. This was noted by the seers thousands of years ago! Medical science has only begun to grasp this concept. As cited in the Introduction, it was only in the 1950s, that a French researcher, Alfred Tomatis M.D., declared that the foetus was capable of hearing.

Bāl samskāras also depend on the environment the husband provides the wife during her pregnancy. After birth, a child is first influenced by the mother, then the father. Parents then have the most important duty to impart samskāras. Two well-known examples from Bhāratvarsh's culture are, of king Gopichand and Sati Madālsā. Gopichand's mother, Menāvati, inspired him in the prime of



toddler offering dandvat pranāms
in his father's footsteps



mother teaching daughter how to
make garlands for Lālji
(Shri Krishna's child form)

opp. page: school teacher showing
her pupils how to offer pranāms at
the Swāminārāyan Akshardhām, New
Delhi



parents lovingly teaching their toddler to offer *pranāms* at *Swāminārāyan Akshardhām*, NewDelhi.



a mother showing her daughter how to offer *pranāms* in a shrine

An Indian actress is fluent with her six-year-old daughter in five Indian languages, in addition to English.

youth, about the miserable and ephemeral nature of mundane pleasures. This induced him to forsake his kingdom to perform austerities in the forest, to realise Paramātmā.

Queen Sati Madālsā gave *samskāras* to all her four princes about the ephemeral *samsāra*. Therefore they renounced their rich kingdom to perform austerities in the same manner as Gopichand.

A child is a supreme mimic. He will mimic adults by wearing spectacles or by folding one leg over the other to sit in an easy chair pretending to read a newspaper. He will cry to quieten his younger baby brother. He will caress his sibling's forehead, mimicking his mother! All because he has observed this in minute detail.

Which scene is preferable? The child mimicking *ārti* or toting a gun at the parents? During *ārti*, he will clap his hands and gurgle a few words. While parents do *pujā*, he will sit aside and observe with curiosity. If parents take him to the *mandir* holding his fingers, then on the next occasion he will go of his own accord. If the father does not offer *dandvat pranāms* to the deities in the *mandir*, but orders him to do so, nothing on earth will induce him to do them, unless the father does them first! If parents observe moral values in life, then children will definitely do so as well.

Therefore it behoves upon the parents to live exemplary lives which become the guiding ideals for children.

Importance of vernacular

Language plays the most important role in imparting *samskāras*. Hindus living outside India would do well to talk to their children in their vernacular – Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, Marathi – as the case may be. From the day a child is born, parents should converse with him in the vernacular. In school he will inevitably learn and speak English. So parents need not worry about English. But at home, it will not be easy to impart Hindu traditions in English. Speaking to children in the vernacular will provide them a basic working vocabulary



with which to impart important samskāras. These will include religious, cultural, ethical and moral values, such as:

- worshipping Paramātmā
- importance of *ahimsā* – vegetarianism
- respect for all elders including relatives, teachers and sadhus,
- sevā* (service) for family, community and Satsang.

These samskāras and the vernacular are inter-dependent. It is said that a culture disintegrates when its language dies out. History has borne this out amongst many communities in the world. For example, the Japanese, Vietnamese, Hispanics and Indians who have settled either in the USA or UK, who failed to transmit their vernacular, have discovered to their horror that they are developing a cultural, familial and generational gap with their offspring.

Whilst discussing failings of language, consider just one, amongst many basic drawbacks of English, which directly influence daily family life. If a Hindu child asks his parent, ‘Where are you going?’ it sounds very rude, because of the ‘you’ pronoun. In Gujarati and Hindi, the pronouns *tamey* and *āp*, equivalent to ‘vous’ in French, not only sound sweet but are far more respectful. These pronouns automatically ingrain in the child a deep respect for his parents and elder siblings. *Tu* (or *tum* – Hindi) equivalent to ‘tu’ in French, is only used for those equal or younger in age.

Therefore it is extremely important for parents to spare special time to teach children one’s vernacular. It is an asset which will be amply rewarded later, especially peace of mind.

BAPS followers who are Gujaratis, should bear in mind and inculcate in their children the glory of Gujarati. It is a sacred language, since Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and the *guru paramparā* spoke it. The language of the sampradāya’s two most sacred texts – Vachanāmrut and Swāmini Vāto – is Gujarati. To crown the reasoning, the guru, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj also speaks Gujarati. Therefore the young should learn it, to understand his sermons and identify with the humorous parables he often vividly narrates.

‘Even in a fit of pain (anger), one should never insult one’s āchārya, father, mother and elder brother.’

– *Manu Smriti* 2/225-226,
Bhavisya Purāna, Brāhma
4/194/195.

By offering pranāms daily and serving elders, one’s longevity, vidya (intellect, honour), fame and strength increase.

– *Manu Smriti* 2/121



samskāras at the guru’s āshrama
(water colour, 1822)



offering pranāms

Pramukh Swami Mahārāj on Bāl Samskāras

“If you do not give your child the asset of Paramātmā, then your financial assets will be ruined.

“Those children who do not have samskāras just roam about. If parents keep good reading material at home, then a holy atmosphere of satsang will prevail. But if there are posters of film stars everywhere, then the child is bound to watch films !

“Some people are of the opinion that they will watch T.V. in moderation, but in reality, no such thing occurs. Once the T.V. arrives, it will destroy samskāras. Immoral scenes and commercials will always be there.”



“Every human being, even living creatures need love. A bird brings morsels of food and places them in her chicks’ mouths. It is our cultural tradition to give love to children. A mother’s samskāras are transmitted during milk feeding, and a father’s by sitting with the child. However only if one has imbibed samskāras will one be able to give them to others. Everyone needs love. A devotee needs to offer love to Bhagwān. Bhagwān and His sadhu certainly do offer their love, which inspires us to offer bhakti. Many will have received love from their parents and grandparents. When does such love arise? For this, one has to become like a child, and to do what he likes. This increases love. When this happens, he will do as he is instructed. If he has never received love, he will roam the streets. That is why we advocate ghar sabhā.”

In the past, grandparents possessed knowledge of dharma. They read shāstras to their children. Similarly if we have read shāstras such as Rāmāyan, Mahābhārat, Gitā, Vachanāmṛut, Shikshāpatri and stories about Dhruva, Prahlād, Natchiketā, then we can affectionately talk about them to children.



a mother reciting a story from a pictorial Mahābhārat



a mother cajoling her daughter to ring a bell in a shrine



a mother showing her son how to do mālā



Then children attain samskāras. Sometimes we have doubts about whether children understand such love. But they do understand, often more than adults. So by talking to them, they consolidate samskāras. As the child grows up, his love for you will have surely strengthened. It is only our jobs and other activities that prevent us from sitting with him, and so he does not receive love. This induces him to go elsewhere to watch T.V. and other things. From these he gets bad ideas. Therefore parents should spare time for children. 'Vāli' means one who gives "vahāl" (love). If one offers love, then even if he is spoilt, he will improve. But if one beats or berates him, then he will not improve.

'Just by listening to his father recite the Rāmāyan by Girdhar, the child Dungar bhakta (Shāstriji Mahārāj), had learnt it by heart.'

— Dave, H.T. 1995 I:22

In this land (U.K.), society itself is materialistic. A child can get swayed by it. But from an early age, if he is informed about our samskāras, family values, former bhaktas, national statesmen, and social leaders, then he may realise that 'I would also like to become like them'. A person is not moulded in a day. He has to strive continually. A sapling does not grow into a tree overnight. It has to be given water and fertiliser for a long time.

We should give our time to children, to sit with them. By giving a toy they will only play. But is it enjoyable? After all, a toy is a toy. It is better to sit with them, love



a group of mothers showing their children how to perform ārti during Ganesh utsav



performing ārti in a ghar mandir



swinging Thākorji in a hindolo during the month of Shrāvan



a mother guiding her children to perform abhishek of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, Amdavad



a father inspiring his son to perform puja of a calf as part of antyeshti rites

them, play with them. Then gradually, we can impart samskāras to them. We do pujā and mālā. From this they are inspired. But we tend to give them something else; T.V. This has the effect of spoiling them. Just as saplings need caring and protection from cattle, children need careful nurture. They should not be exposed to bad influence. One must be vigilant that they do not stray in wrong directions."

**Pramukh Swami Mahārāj's blessings on parents' day,
London Mandir, 10 November 2006.**

(Source: Swāminārāyan Prakāsh, January 2007).



a mother teaching Hindi



*a mother showing her son how to make offerings in a
mandir*



*bāl samskāras in the form of inspiring stories from the shāstras,
BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Neasden, London*

Part 4 – Personal Rituals

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Introduction

The chapter on Ashtāṅg Yog clarifies many false beliefs touted in the West about Yog. The principles, disciplines and rituals of Ashtāṅg Yog are eight-fold. The Western psyche has gone overboard about the third limb of āsana – postures, which are (mis)understood solely as health enhancers. The second misnomer is about prāṇāyāma – the fourth limb, which is touted as breathing exercises. Therefore Ch.27 clarifies the true purpose and goal of Ashtāṅg Yog, which is primarily a spiritual endeavour to realise Paramātmā using the body, mind and ātmā under the guidance of a realised Yogi. The remaining six chapters in Part IV are perhaps the most practically significant to Hindus since they deal with important stages of life such as the Sixteen Samskāras – rites of passage, rituals for the deceased and ancestors, and vows of self denial and austerities which include various forms of fasting. The section on *Āhār Shuddhi* – diet purity may prove interesting to all Hindus. This is especially relevant today in the age of consumerism. Tasty, cheap, commercial fast foods and products are becoming a major part of the diet of Hindus abroad, reducing and in cases, almost replacing the mother’s role in the kitchen. This is a major cause of concern not only to the physical health of individuals, but more importantly, undermining their mental and spiritual health as well. People seem to care little for all the three levels of health. The ostensible belief seems to be, ‘if it tastes good it has to be healthy.’ Nothing can be further from the truth. This is the experience and declaration of the seers endowed with foresight and vision.

By adopting Western diet styles and tastes, Hindus abroad are now experiencing the health disorders suffered by the host culture. The culprit is tasty refined commercial foods overladen with salt, fats, sugar, devoid of fibre, and cola drinks which are collectively contributing to a host of illnesses not witnessed in the first Hindu migrants to the US, Canada and UK, in the 60s.



Samādhi

Dhyāna

Dhāraṇā

Pratyāhār

Prāṇāyāma

Āsana

Niyama

Yama

27. Ashtāng Yog



अष्टांग योग

- Yama (self-restraint)
- Niyama (external and internal purity)
- Āsana (postures)
- Prānāyāma (control of prāna with breath)
- Pratyāhār (withdrawal of senses from their objects)
- Dhāranā (concentration)
- Dhyāna (meditation)
- Samādhi (God-realisation)

Many rituals and observances cited in other chapters of this book also form some steps of Ashtāng Yog, a highly spiritual discipline that holistically encompasses the body, mind, ātmā and Paramātmā. As such, these rituals need to be discussed, even if slightly repetitious in the context of Ashtāng Yog.

Patanjali rishi (200 BCE) composed a Sanskrit text known as *Yog Darshanam*, whose, shlokas are known as *Yog sutras*. The word *yog* is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj* – to unite, to merge – with Paramātmā – *yuj samyoge*. However this is an Advaitic interpretation. In Swāminārāyan Darshan, *yog* means to realise Paramātmā, rather than merging in Him. *Sutra* literally means thread. Patanjali's *Yog sutras* are concise 'threads' of profound yogic wisdom.

Maharshi Patanjali's Ashtāng Yog comprises eight factors or 'limbs', namely; *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Āsana*, *Prānāyāma*, *Pratyāhār*, *Dhāranā*, *Dhyāna* and *Samādhi*. The postures of the mispronounced word 'yoga', practised worldwide, form only the third limb of Ashtāng Yog. Hence people in the West are little aware of the absolute pre-requisite of the first two limbs, of *yama* and *niyama*, in order to truly become eligible to practice āsana. Without *yama* and *niyama*, āsana has beneficial effects on the physical body. Of themselves, postures cannot master the *indriyas* (senses) and edify a person's temperament. Any beneficial effects accrued by āsanās, on the body and its metabolism, can be wiped away by a single act or thought of violence, deceit, theft, lust – the factors of *yama*. This also applies to the factors associated with *niyama*, namely external and internal purity, contentment, austerities such as fasting and self-denial, study of shāstras and bhakti for Paramātmā.



Maharshi Patanjali

Source : *Rishis, Mystics & Heroes of India* © 2006.

Swāminārāyan Aksharpath, Amdavad

opp. page: oil on canvas by
Sadhu Narayanprasaddas

Therefore the foregoing sections consider important practical rituals involved in some of the eight limbs of Ashtāng Yog.

1. Yama (self-restraint)

This means to control passions and diverting the mind from undesirable worldly thoughts and focus them on the *ātmā*. There are five factors (Yog Darshan 2/30):

(i) *Ahimsā*

This is non-injury in mind, speech and action towards any creature at any time in any manner;

mind – not to think maliciously of others,

speech – not to use foul language, swear, backbite or quarrel

action – avoiding injury to a person or creature.

One should not address elders by their names and a person older than oneself by using 'tu' (तु, त्वम्)

– Mahābhārat, Shānti Parva 193/24

One can understand physical *ahimsā*. However *ahimsā*, in word and thought is more subtle. In the former, one's speech should be sweet and dignified. Rudeness, crudity, foul language, name-calling, cracking jokes on somebody, satire or even raising one's voice – are factors which can hurt the person targetted. The Paramātmā within him, as *Antaryāmi*, will also be hurt. This increases one's bad karmas. Therefore avoiding such speech and cultivating dignified speech, is a form of ritual that a *sādhak* should strive for.

Ahimsā in thought is even more demanding. It requires both introspection and effort. Thinking a bad thought about somebody whom we do not like or have a grudge against, tantamounts to *himsā*.

During a heated exchange, violent epithets may even flit across one's mental screen, without actually voicing them. To overcome and avoid these on future occasions, the only lasting and tranquil solutions are prayer, forgiveness and vociferously chanting Bhagwān's mantras. The latter is a sure fire ritual advocated by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan in the Vachanāmṛt (Loyā 6). Prayer and forgiveness are mental 'rituals', while mantra chanting (*nām japa*) is a verbal ritual.

In the Mahābhārat (Van Parva 29/36, 37, 40), Yudhisthira extols immense glory of forgiveness to Draupadi: 'Forgiveness is dharma, *yagna*, Vedas, Brahman, truth, *tapas*, purity, the effulgence of all the yogis... donation and fame.'

Yogiji Mahārāj, the fourth spiritual successor of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, advocated forgiveness and tolerance, which lead to 'fountains of joy from the heart and



peace within and the great (Satpurush) is pleased from the heart...’! (Yogi Gitā, Sunrut, 4th principle).

By chronically harbouring vengeance, anger or hostility, one can never experience *shānti* within – *ashāntasya kutah sukham* (Gitā 2/66). On the contrary they are destructive to an individual’s *ātmā*, mind and body and also his family and society. Researchers today also corroborate this. In *Forgiveness (Theory, Research & Practice)*, the medical authors cite studies documenting that chronic hostility is associated with negative health outcomes (McCullough 2000:257).

Besides forgiveness and tolerance, an even greater ideal of *ahimsā* is advocated by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan.

Kshantavyameva sarveshām chintaniyam hitam cha taihi

– Shikshāpatri (201)

– always think good of the dissenter!

Such an ideal of wishing good, has also been the hallmark of His spiritual successors, even when attempts were made on their lives.

(ii) Satya (truthfulness)

One should live a truthful life in thought, speech and action. Regarding speech, one should speak that truth which is also benevolent and pleasing (Manu Smruti 4/138).

A truthful statement which may be benevolent, but not pleasant and therefore hurt a person’s feelings should not be spoken (Manu Smruti 4/141). Yogiji Mahārāj often uttered this psychologically sound and wise statement; to always utter speech which is *satya* (truthful), *hitkar* (benevolent) and *priya* (pleasant).

Another important factor concerning *satya*, is to earn one’s living without deceit, fraud, or theft. This includes gaining money by gambling, betting and lottery (Shikshāpatri 18). For the young attending school or college, *satya* means to work diligently, not to copy from other’s, nor to cheat in exams. To observe this *satya*, one must cultivate an understanding that Bhagwān is omnipresent and omniscient. One cannot fool Him. Moreover, cheating never pleases Him nor one’s spiritual guru. Non-truth or *asatya* in any form is a bad karma, which results in bad fruits. One subtle form of *satya* is not to disclose secrets of others (Shikshāpatri 75).

(iii) Asteya (avoiding stealing possessions of others)

Taking something that does not rightfully belong to one-self, without permission of the owner or by violating the codes

of conduct enjoined by the shāstras, is known as theft. Just thinking of acquiring something that belongs to others is also considered theft. Stealing gold (or currency in any form) is one of the five great sins – *Panch Mahāpāp* (Manu Smṛuti 11/55).

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan even forbids taking flowers or any other object for benevolent purposes without the owner's permission (Shikshāpatri 17). This means that one should not steal even for donating to deities in a mandir or to the poor. One should remain contented with that which has been earned lawfully, by the sweat of one's brow. Tax evasion is also a form of theft. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and Pramukh Swami Mahārāj too, enjoin followers to pay tax regularly and to donate five or ten per cent of one's income to Bhagwān (Shikshāpatri 147).

(iv) Brahmacharya (celibacy)

Brahmacharya is the observance of eight-fold celibacy and to remain engrossed in Brahman. For householders the shāstras consider brahmacharya as *ek nāri sadā brahmachārī* – one who is loyal to his (one) wife, is a celibate. Prior to marriage the shāstras forbid pre-marital relations. This is discussed in Ch.30 – Sixteen Samskāras p.299, and Ch.26 – Bāl Samskāras p.203.

As far as Ashtāṅg Yog is concerned, *brahmacharya* is an extremely important factor in conserving *virya* (vital energy) and boosting the spiritual energy (*ojas*) in an individual. Factors which dissipate energy and de-stabilise one's spiritual equilibrium destroy the benefits that may be accrued from the preceding three, of Yama. These factors include those of *āhār* (food) and *vihār* (activity). Concepts of *āhār* are discussed in Ch.33 – Āhār Shuddhi. *Vihār* entails control in sleep, work and lustful activities. The latter includes not just the conjugal act, but avoiding lustful visuals (including reading), discussion, touch (including indecent clothing), hearing, smell, company and thought. The shāstras enjoin rituals, fasts and observances of self-control for the perfection of each of these factors. These are cited in other sections of this book. They include imbibing *ātmanishthā* – realising oneself as *ātmā* and not the body, identifying the *ātmā* with Aksharbrahman and worshipping Parabrahman, and keeping the mind engrossed in *Navdhā bhakti* (Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā II-33). *Navdhā bhakti* is discussed in Ch.12.

After all the intellectual, albeit shallow arguments hurled by materialistic psyche against *brahmacharya*, Bhagwān



Swāminārāyan supports Sanātan Dharma's ideals of *brahmacharya*:

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan on brahmacharya

‘If a person staunchly observes *nishkāṁ dharma* (vow of non-lust), then he is never far from Bhagwān... My affection for such a person never diminishes... If he strictly observes that vow, then even if I were a thousand miles away from him, I would still be close to him. Conversely if a person is lax in observing this vow, then even if he is beside me, he is as good as a hundred thousand miles away. I do not like to be served by such a person.’

– Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā II-33

The Manu Smṛuti (2/94) declares that sexual desires are insatiable. *Vishay bhog* – indulgence in the sense pleasures – ruins a person (Vairāgyashatak 12).

(v) Aparigraha (detached living with minimum requirements)

Simple living is the key to happiness. The more possessions a person has the greater his mental burden and the greater the craving to acquire further possessions, either lawfully or unlawfully. The latter may involve violence in some form.

This further increases his misery. This misery is a great impediment in Ashtāng Yog. The mind needs to be free of material garbage in order to perfect *yog*. This requires a firm commitment to live a simple life – of simple clothing, simple food, minimum material requirements and comfort, and a maximum detachment from them.

Moreover, the law of karma dictates the amount of material possessions a person is destined to gain in life. Therefore any extra, any overload will disappear sooner or later. Hence it is futile to hoard possessions and wise to remain contented with that graced by Bhagwān.

2. Niyama (external and internal purity)

As with *yama*, *niyama* also comprises five factors: *shauch*, *santosh*, *tapas*, *swādhyāy* and *Ishvara pranidhān* (Yog Darshan 2/32).

(i) Shauch (purity)

This means both external and internal purity.

The Manu Smṛuti (5/109) elaborates that water purifies the body, truthfulness purifies the mind, the *jivātmā* is purified by knowledge and austerities and the intellect (*buddhi*) is purified by knowledge.

These rituals of *shauch* which purify the body such as bathing are discussed on pp.256-258. The rituals to purify the mind foremost obligates a pure and *sāttvic* diet. The Chhāndogya Upanishad (7/26/2) stipulates:

|| *Āhār shuddhau sattva shuddhih, sattva shuddhau druvā smriti,*
smriti labhe sarvagranthinām vipramokshah ||

– purity of diet purifies the *antahkaran* (mind). Purity of *antahkaran* stabilises the mind and meditation. After mastering meditation the baser instincts (*vāsanā*) are instantly eradicated.

Purity of diet means avoiding flesh of all types, and foods and drinks which increase the *tāmasic* and *rājasic* tendencies of the mind. These are discussed in Ch.33, *Āhār Shuddhi*.

The next and higher step of purifying the mind is elaborated by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan in the *Vachanāmṛt*. These are *satsang* – associating with Bhagwān and His realised sadhu – and *navdhā bhakti*. In the latter, the most important, is to keep the mind engrossed in listening to Bhagwān's *kathā* – discourses of His glory and *lilā* – divine episodes (Kāriyāni 12, Gadhadā II-33, Gadhadā III-11).

(ii) Santosh (contentment)

Santosh means to remain fully contented with whatever Bhagwān provides and has provided. Craving for more invites misery – *duhkha*. During an individual's life, his *prārabdha* karmas will dictate his wealth, health, longevity and possessions. One cannot alter one's *prārabdha* karmas. These are karmas ingrained in the physical body. Acquiring more than what is lawfully destined, will either be whiled away or remain unused by him. The *Bruhatkathāmanjari* text states that a disc of infatuation, *moha*, desire and worry always hovers over the head of an immensely wealthy and extremely greedy person. Therefore the *shāstras* and rishis advocate *santosh*, an immensely potent factor in remaining happy and stress-free.

The *Gitā*'s (2/47) injunction is just as valid; to perform one's karmas diligently, and foresake expectation of their fruits. This means to work or earn lawfully within one's capacity, and to remain contented with the resulting fruits.

(iii) Tapas (austerity)

Tapas does not only mean performing physical austerities. It also means to tolerate hardships; especially the dualities of heat-cold, hunger-thirst, happiness-unhappiness,

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते
मा फलेषु कदाचन



honour-insult, gain-loss, and so forth. Subtle but important forms of *tapas* also include: remaining vigilant every moment, to live a life of *samskāras*, to inculcate *ātmachintan* that ‘I am the pure *ātmā*, not the body’, to perform only those actions in daily life that are necessary and helpful, and most importantly, to forego one’s own resolutions and beliefs and to obey the guru’s wishes and commands.

However the *śāstras* advocate rituals of *tapas* such as fasting, self-denial, vigils and rigours. These cleanse the body, mind and *vāsanā* and strengthen the *ātmā*. *Vrat-upavās* are forms of *tapas*, discussed in Ch.32.

(iv) *Swādhyāy* (regular study of truthful *śāstras*)

Bhagwān Veda Vyās defines *swādhyāya* as:

Pranavādi pavitrānām japo mokshashāstrānām madhyayānām yā.

– chanting the Omkāṛ (Pranav) mantra and studying true *śāstras* with devotion, is called *swādhyāya* or regular study.

The practical ritual of studying the *śāstras* is discussed in Ch.11 – Pārāyan and Ch.24 – Ghar Satsang Sabhā.

(v) *Ishvara pranidhān* (bhakti of Paramātmā)

Maharshi Patanjali makes an amazing statement about *Ishvara pranidhān*, that by deep devotion and surrender to *Ishvara* (Paramātmā) it is possible to attain *samādhi*.

Samādhi-siddhir Ishvara-pranidhānāt

– Yog Darshan 2/45

This is an alternate path, mid-way, which can also achieve *Samādhi* – the final goal of Ashtāṅg Yog. To consider an example of this, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan explains in *Vachanāmṛt Gadhadā I-42*, that the gopis’ unalloyed bhakti for Shri Krishna resulted in their *chitta* being merged with him. Therefore without recourse to Ashtāṅg Yog, they attained Ashtāṅg Yog and its final limb of *samādhi*; union with Shri Krishna. He explains that by the path of Ashtāṅg Yog, a yogi achieves the state of: *yogashchittavrutti nirodhah* (Gadhadā I-25). However the gopis achieved this just by being totally engrossed in offering him exuberant bhakti.

The rituals of bhakti, which are equivalent to *Ishvara pranidhān*, are elaborated in Part 2 – Bhakti rituals.



swādhyāya – study of *śāstras*

3. Āsana

These are the 84 yogic postures, mistakenly referred to as ‘yoga’ in the West. Āsana is just the third limb of Yog. An āsana is mastered when a practitioner can remain quite

comfortable in a posture: *sthirasukhamāsanam* (Yog Darshan 2/46).

As cited earlier, just by mastering a few or all 84 *āsanas* does not make a yogi. He needs to practice all the factors of Yama and Niyama, prior to practicing *āsana*, as well as those that follow it.

For a person today, time constraints prevent him from mastering all 84 *āsanas*. A select few can be practiced everyday under the guidance of an expert.

A few practical rituals which automatically incorporate several *āsanas* in the daily life of a *bhakta* are: *padmāsan* (lotus-posture) and *surya namaskār* in the form of *dandvat pranāms* in the morning *pujā*. *Sukhāsan* – sitting cross-legged, can be practiced while having one's meals by sitting on the floor, rather than on a table and while sitting in a *satsang* or *ghar sabhā*.



padmāsan (lotus-posture)

Prānāyāma's powerful effects

Mastering *prānāyāma* can have powerful effects. The Bengali poet and mystic, Shri Aurobindo, practised *prānāyāma* for up to six hours per day. He then observed, 'Prānāyāma makes one's intellect sharper and one's brain quicker.' Initially he could write about 200 lines of poetry a month. After mastering *prānāyāma*, he composed 200 lines in only half an hour. He commented, '...poetry came like a river and prose like a flood...' (Diwakar 1976:111-112).



4. *Prānāyāma* (control of *prāna* with breath)

Prānāyāma is not a breathing exercise, as is falsely touted in the West. It is dangerous to start practicing *prānāyāma* without guidance from an expert in *yog*.

Prāna is a subtle form of energy that flows in the body, which maintains all activities in the body. It also exists externally in the universe. *Āyām* means restraint or control. Therefore *prānāyāma* is the control of *prāna* through breath. Its importance in *Yog* is that *prāna* and the mind are intimately related. By controlling *prāna*, the constantly wavering mind can be controlled. Thus *prānāyāma* prepares the mind for *Dhāranā*, *Dhyāna* and *Samādhi*.

In certain *pujā* rituals, the pundit advocates *anuloma-pratiloma prānāyāma* to the participants. This is to purify 'nādis' – *prānic* channels. This form of *prānāyāma* lasts only a minute or two, in which air is inhaled through one nostril and exhaled through the other.

For perfection of *prānāyāma*, it is necessary to master the preceding three limbs of *Ashtāng Yog*, namely, Yama, Niyama and *Āsana*. For young Hindus abroad who suffer from mucous disorders, such as colds, sinus congestion, hay fever and asthma, *prānāyāma* would be difficult, if not impossible. It is here that factors of *āhār* cited in Ch.33 apply. They should avoid mucous causing (कफकारक) foods such as dairy products, sugars and wheat. Clogged airways need to be



literally “as clean as a whistle” for prāṇāyāma to be effective. The greatest benefit to school children and students, is that prāṇāyāma helps concentrate the mind easily and increases memory and creativity.

5. Pratyāhār (withdrawal of senses from their objects)

This is the control of the senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin) by the mind, and diverting them inwards from their respective objects.

|| Svavishayāsamprayoge chittaswarupānukāra evendriyānām pratyahāra ||

– Yog Darshan 2/54

In essence, *pratyāhār* is a technique in which the mind withdraws into itself. The *indriyas* cease to function independently. It is similar to an inventor who is so engrossed in a problem that his mind is completely shut off from the external world, involuntarily. However in *pratyāhār*, the mind remains within itself and the external world is shut out by sheer will power, in Rāj Yog. In Bhakti Yog, this occurs by the supreme attractive power of an object of devotional love within – Paramātmā.

The first five limbs of Ashtāṅg Yog – *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Āsana*, *Prāṇāyāma* and *Pratyāhār* are known as *Bahirang* – external limbs of yog. The remaining three – *Dhāranā*, *Dhyāna* and *Samādhi* are *Antarang* – internal.

In summary, the first five limbs of Yog eliminate disturbances to the mind from different sources in the following manner:

Limbs	Disturbances eliminated
Yama and Niyama	– emotional, due to moral defects in oneself.
Āsana	– physical, which arise in the physical body.
Prāṇāyāma	– those caused by irregular flow of prāṇa in the <i>prāṇic</i> sheath.
Pratyāhār	– those flowing in through the <i>indriyas</i> .

After mastering these five, the *sādhak* is capable of embarking on the *Antarang* limbs of Yog.



ascetic performing prāṇāyāma

6. *Dhāranā* (concentration)

This is confining the mind within a limited mental field or object of concentration.

Deshbandhaschittasya dhāranā

– Yog Darshan (3/1)

The word ‘concentration’ has a different meaning in yog philosophy compared to that in Western psychology. The latter believes that the mind cannot be made to remain focused on any object for any considerable time. It is just a controlled movement of the mind within a limited field. In Yog, concentration begins with the controlled movement of the mind and it can reach a state in which all movements cease. The mind becomes one with the object concentrated upon and can move no further.



a young devotee meditating

7. *Dhyāna* (meditation)

Dhyāna is the unbroken flow of the mind towards the object (chosen for meditation):

Tatra pratyayaikatānatā dhyānam

– Yog Darshan 3/2

In Bhakti Yog, Paramātmā is the focus of *dhyāna*. The difference between *dhāranā* and *dhyāna* is that in the former occasional distractions occur. In *dhyāna* there is absence of distractions and unbroken continuity of meditation on Paramātmā.

The *sādhak* has to practice *dhyāna* diligently, despite setbacks. In the Vachanāmṛt, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan enjoins two practical injunctions for meditation:

(1) to meditate with faith on Bhagwān along with his ideal *bhakta* (Gadhadā I-5).

(2) to continue *dhyāna* without losing heart, with renewed *shraddhā*. He should not be discouraged even if this process takes 10, 20, 25 or even a 100 years (Gadhadā I-15).

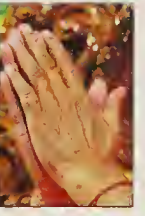
8. *Samādhi* (God-realisation)

This is a transcendent state in which there is consciousness only of the object of meditation – Paramātmā – and not of the mind itself.

Tadevārthamātranirbhāsam svarupashunyamiva samādhīh.

– Yog Darshan 3/3

The Advait system believes that in *samādhi*, the *sādhak* merges in the divine light of Paramātmā. However



Swāminārāyan Darshan believes that the pure *ātmā* realises Paramātmā's *sākār* form and he, the Akshar-rup *ātmā* maintains his separate identity. And he only attains such *samādhi*, not by his personal *sāadhanā*, but by the grace of Aksharbrahman, the ideal disciple and divine abode of Parabrahman.

However, *samādhi* through Ashtāng Yog is an extremely difficult endeavour for the householder who has a family to support, is time-pressured and is beset with multiple problems of samsāra. Therefore Bhagwān Swāminārāyan recommends another method of controlling the *chitta*. In Vachanāmrut Gadhadā I-25, He first explains that *samādhi* can be experienced in two ways. One is through Ashtāng Yog, in which the *chitta* is controlled by controlling *prāna*.

The other method is most practical and feasible for everybody. In this, the *chitta* focuses on Paramātmā after shedding *vāsanā* – worldly desires. Only a singular desire for Paramātmā remains. In this way, by controlling *chitta*, the *pranas* are controlled. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan further declares that a *bhakta*, whose *chitta vrutti* becomes focused on Bhagwān, masters Ashtāng Yog without even attempting to master it.

Ultimately in *samādhi*, a *sādhak* experiences realisation (*sākshātkār*) of Paramātmā, either through Ashtāng Yog or intense and unalloyed *bhakti* for Paramātmā, also known as *premlakshanā bhakti*. As an example of the latter form, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan cites the Gopis. Their *premlakshanā bhakti* was so profound, that they harboured no other worldly desire. They only yearned to attain Shri Krishna, who was *gunātīt* and divine. By their love for him, they too became *gunātīt* and *nirgun* – devoid of *māyā*, and attained Paramātmā's Akshardhām (Vachanāmrut Gadhadā I-42).

In Vachanāmrut Loyā 12, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan advocates a form of worship, as a practical ritual and endeavour to attain the highest nirvikalp samādhi. This is highest state of realisation of Bhagwān, without any doubts or desires (Vachanāmrut Gadhadā II-14, Vartāl-1). He enjoins bhaktas to firmly cultivate the belief that, '...countless millions of universes, each encircled by the eight barriers, appear like mere atoms before Aksharbrahman. Such is the greatness of Akshar, the abode of Purushottam Nārāyan. One who worships Purushottam, having become Akshar-rup, can be said to possess the highest level of 'nirvikalp faith'.

'Nirvikalp faith' is synonymous for nirvikalp samādhi.

To become Akshar-rup (like Akshar). Bhagwān Swāminārāyan reveals the simplest and easiest path in Vachanāmrut Vartāl 11; to develop profound love for the Satpurush (Aksharbrahman). This is similar to the case of the Gopis, who had such love for Shri Krishna and became 'Krishna-rup'.



28. Nitya Pujā (Daily worship)



नित्य पूजा

- Nitya pujā
- Nitya pujā performed in the morning
- The necessity of a personal nitya pujā
- Murtis worshipped in the nitya pujā
- The sequence of the nitya pujā
- Nitya pujā in light of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's teachings
- Personal nitya pujā and pujā of the ghar mandir
- Nitya pujā in illness and old age
- Maintaining purity of pujā
- The daily deed to be performed immediately after nitya pujā
- The benefits of nitya pujā
- Pramukh Swami Mahārāj's sentiments about nitya pujā

Nitya pujā

Nitya means daily. *Pujā* in Sanskrit means to adore, to worship. *Pujā* is to worship Paramātmā. Therefore Paramātmā's *pujā* performed every day is known as *nitya* *pujā*. If someone saves us from drowning, then we would still remember him on special occasions, such as his birthday or Diwāli. That is a subtle act of *pujā*. But gradually we tend to forget favours and obligations. A favour is to be remembered and returned, whilst an ill act on oneself by someone should be forgiven and forgotten. By remembering a favour, man becomes humble, for he realises that his life depends on the help of others. Therefore he is also inspired to help others.

Paramātmā's blessings on us are countless. We are greatly indebted to Him. Simultaneously, the guru's obligations on us are also unrepayable, for he shows us the true path and continually infuses strength to walk that path. Over a period of time we tend to forget our debt to Paramātmā and the guru, and this retards our spiritual ascent. To prevent this, it behoves upon us to be ever vigilant. *Nitya* *pujā* is the daily *pujā* of the *murtis* of Paramātmā and the guru. It is a blissful encounter, a meeting with Paramātmā and the guru. In comparison to their profound grace on us, *nitya* *pujā* is our way of returning love and gratitude, no matter how petty and insignificant.



Tamil brahmin performing nitya pujā

opp page: BAPS children's forum performing nitya pnjā, Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Chicago

Nitya puja evokes feelings of love and adoration. On occasions it may feel mechanical. If a wick and ghee are present then someday a light will be kindled. Yet how can we demand a light when we have got rid of the wick?

Nitya puja performed in the morning

The shāstras declare that the early hours of the morning are especially auspicious. As such, any sacred activity performed in the morning results in greater *punya*. If an infamous person such as Rāvana is remembered in the morning, then one is influenced by evil desires, of hate and jealousy, of gaining power and wealth and becoming egoistic, as did Rāvana. On the other hand, meditating on Paramātmā and the *Gumātīt Sadhm* awakens one's spiritual attributes of dharma, *jnān*, *vairāgya* and bhakti. The heart will be suffused with redemptive attributes such as: truth, compassion, benevolence, mercy, *ahimsā*, *brahmacharya*, tolerance, forgiveness, generosity. Then one experiences peace.

Importance of Brāhma muhurt

The Nārada Pancharatnam enjoins:

|| *Brāhme muhurte uthānam kuryāt pragudayādravehe* ||

– Sankarshan Samhitā, Āchārrātre 1/50

– one should wake up during *brāhma muhurt* before sunrise.

Awakening before sunrise is also enjoined in the Vedas for health, prosperity and longevity (Rig Veda 1/125/1, Sāma Veda 35). One who does not arise even after sunrise loses his lustre (Atharva Veda 7/16/2).

The Manu Smṛiti (8-12), reveals:

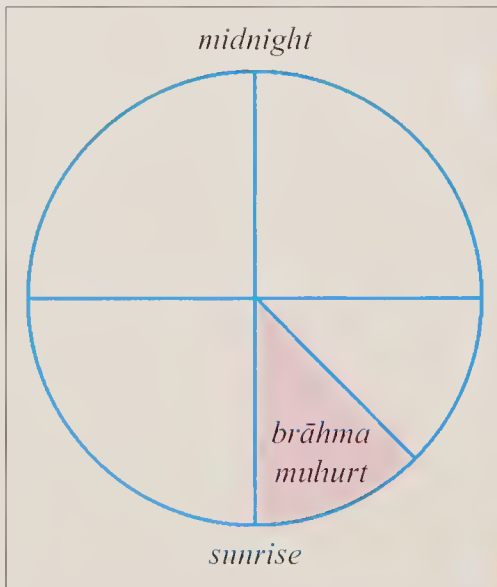
|| *Brāhme muhurte yā nidrā sā punyakshayakārini.* ||

– the sleep during *brāhma muhurt* (48 to 96 minutes before sunrise) destroys *punya* – spiritual merit.

Biological effects during brāhma muhurt

During the early pre-dawn hours, the atmosphere is rich in oxygen and has less carbon-dioxide compared to late morning. The body's circadian rhythms are also such that the mind can concentrate more easily during worship rituals such as puja, mantra *japa* and meditation. Hence a person is able to reap greater spiritual benefits from bhakti rituals performed during *brāhma muhurt*.

Ayurvedic texts also laud *brāhma muhurt*:



Before getting out of bed one should recall Bhagwān (sankirtan). This helps one pass the whole day in remembrance of Hari.

– Sankarshan Samhitā, Āchārrātre 1/51, 53

On getting out of bed one should first place the left foot on the floor.

– Sankarshan Samhitā, Āchārrātre 1/54

*Varnam kirtim matim Lakshmin swāsthyamāyushcha vidanti
brāhme muhurte samjāgrachchhi hyavā paukaj yathā*

– Bhavaprakāsh sār 93

– one who wakes up during *brāhma muhurt* gains goodness, prosperity, intellect, health and longevity. In this manner the body becomes as beautiful as a lotus.

For longevity a person should awaken during *brāhma muhurt* (Ashtanghrudaya, Sutrasthān 2/1).

Personal nitya pujā

Some people reveal naively that one of their family members performs the *pujā* and lights a *divo* in the *ghar mandir*, so the rest have no need to do *pujā* themselves!

To this rationale, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj says :

*“When we feel hungry, if someone else eats on our behalf, will that satisfy us? When we are thirsty, if somebody else drinks water, will it quench our thirst? If we feel sleepy, and if somebody else sleeps for us, will we be rested? Only we can do those things for ourselves. No one can do them for us. Similarly, everyone should do their own *pujā*. By doing *pujā* ourselves, it is we who get to serve *Paramātmā* and it is we who reap the benefits. It is the person who does the *pujā* who is strengthened, inspired and whose base instincts are removed. For personal development and a personal session with *Paramātmā*, a personal *pujā* is performed.”*

Murtis in nitya pujā

There is only one creator, sustainer and protector of the infinite universes and that is *Paramātmā* – *Purushottam Nārāyan*. For the *bhakta*, all *avatārs* are included in this form. In the *Swāminārāyan sampradāya*, the form of worship (*upāsana*) advocated is of *Bhagwān Swāminārāyan* with His foremost *bhakta*, the *Gunātī* sadhu. Therefore in the *nitya pujā*, the *murtis* to be worshipped are of *Akshar* and *Purushottam* and the *Gunātī paramparā*.

The *murtis* should be of the whole figure. A portrait (just the face) is not suitable. Worn-out or torn *murtis* should be replaced. There should be only one *murti* each of *Bhagwān Swāminārāyan* and of the *Gunātī paramparā*.

Sequence of nitya pujā

Devotees of the BAPS *Swāminārāyan* sansthā follow the *nitya pujā* ritual described below. The reasons and *bhāvnā* behind each procedure are dealt with later (pp.236-254).



1. traditional wooden tilakiyu to imprint tilak on forehead.

2. until the late 19th century, sadhus used to make the orasiyu from a coconut shell. The chandan tablet is rubbed on the orasiyu using a few drops of water to make a thin paste.

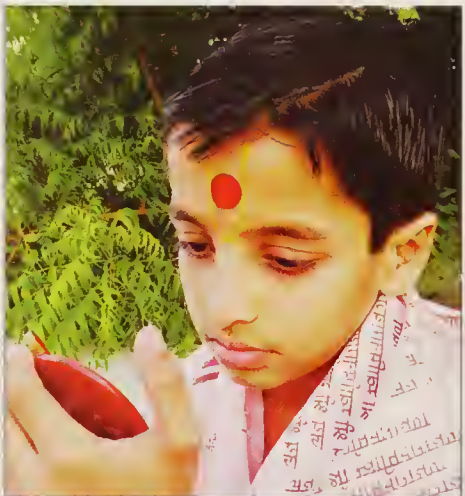


applying sandalwood paste on the tilakiyu



imprinting tilak

imprinting chāndlo with a
traditional chāndaliyu



1. The ideal time for puṇā

Ideally, one should wake up before sunrise and have a bath or shower. In countries where the timings of sunrise fluctuate – between the summer and winter months, an ideal time would be before 6.00 am. – a time advocated by Pramukh Swami Mahārāj for those living outside India. The young, aged or ill are exempted. But doing puṇā late in the morning, or afternoon or evening, solely due to a bad habit of waking up late does not conform to the shāstras' injunctions.

2. Clothing

- The clothes worn during puṇā should be washed and preferably kept separate from those worn during the day. For males, a *dhotiyu* and a *gātariyu* are the ideal. After puṇā, both should be neatly folded and placed in a plastic bag so that they do not touch other clothes in a drawer or cupboard. This is the *sāttvic* and traditional Vedic attire handed down by the rishis and sadhus. Hence it induces *sāttvic* thoughts during puṇā.
- It is preferable not to wear a shirt and a pair of trousers, shorts or jeans during such a sacred bhakti ritual. It is also not religious etiquette to wear a bath towel or pyjamas during puṇā! When we meet a dignitary we obviously wear decent and presentable clothes. *Nitya* puṇā is our personal appointment with Paramātmā. Therefore we should also cultivate appropriate etiquette. Talking and fidgeting during puṇā should be avoided.

3. Place

The room with the ghar mandir is preferable. DVD's of bhajans playing in the background may help boost puṇā for some people.

4. Āsana

- An āsana – a piece of cloth or mat, should be laid on the floor for one to sit on. One should face either east or north. In Sanātan Dharma, these two directions are considered auspicious.



- Next, in front of our āsana, another āsana should be laid for the *murtis*. The Shikshāpatri, Vachanāmrut and the tilak-*chāndlo* paraphernalia should be placed neatly on one side.

5. Tilak-*chāndlo* for male *bhaktas*

- First the tilak should be imprinted on the forehead using sandalwood paste.
- Then, in the middle of the tilak, a round kumkum (red) *chāndlo* should be imprinted. The kumkum should preferably not be of sandalwood paste, unless one is allergic to the kumkum powder. A non-allergenic herbal kumkum powder is available.
- Using sandalwood paste, a tilak and *chāndlo* should be imprinted on both the upper arms and in the middle of the chest.

6. For female *bhaktas*

- Bhagwān Swāminārāyan says in the Shikshāpatri (52, 53):

‘Married women should imprint only a round kumkum mark on their foreheads. Widows shall not put on tilak or the round kumkum mark.’

- Unmarried women also do not imprint any mark on their foreheads.

7. Meditation (*dhyāna*)

- One should then sit for *dhyāna* in the yogic posture of *siddhāsan* or *padmāsan*. If this is not possible, one can sit in the normal cross-legged posture. One should also sit up, with a straight back (Gitā 6/13-14). An erect spinal-cord promotes better blood flow to the brain.
- One then meditates on Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and the *Gunātīt* Sadhu – Pramukh Swami Mahārāj, avoiding all worldly thoughts.
- To aid concentration, one can also perform the *Om* or *bhramari* prānāyāma prior to meditation. The remarkable effects of prānāyāma on concentrating the mind have been verified by modern researchers (see p.220).

Question posed by Gulzarilal Nanda (interim Prime Minister of India on two occasions) to Shāstriji Mahārāj, Samvat 1995 (1939 CE) Mumbai.

‘Why should one keep Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s murti or any other murti during dhyāna?’

Shāstriji Mahārāj, ‘One gets instant results. One achieves concentration on Bhagwān’s form & develops affection for Him. One’s vrutti (consciousness) gets attached to Him and one achieves sākshātkār (realisation).’

– Shri Yagnapurush Charitam Part I. (2007:24/8)



padmāsan (lotus posture)



dhyāna

What should one do during meditation?

Question posed by Gulzarilal Nanda to Shāstriji Mahārāj, Samvat 1995 (1939 CE) Mumbai.

‘One does experience peace (in dhyāna), but is peace the fruit of dhyāna or is there something greater as well?’

‘There is something far greater than that. After dhyāna and bhajan are mastered, that endeavour becomes second nature. Then the light of knowledge kindles in the ātmā. In that one has Mahārāj’s (Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s) supreme darshan. That is the final fruit – the state of Bhagwān’s realisation.’

– Dave, H.T. (1995 II:35)

(1) Ātmachintan

To think about the ātmā and one’s true identity, in the following way :

‘I am ātmā, separate from this material body (gross, subtle and causal). Bhagwān Shri Swāminārāyan constantly resides in my ātmā. Pramukh Swami Mahārāj, the embodiment of Aksharbrahman, is my ātmā.’

(2) Aim of life

One should internally vocalise the goal of one’s life :

- ‘Under any circumstance and at any cost, I want to please Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and Pramukh Swami Mahārāj only.’
- ‘By becoming Akshar-rup (like Akshar) I want to serve Purushottam’ (Shikshāpatri 116).

(3) Mānsi puṇjā

- In mānsi puṇjā (devotion offered mentally) one can perform the shodshopchār puṇjā of Paramātmā and the guru. One should try to evoke deep feelings of love and adoration from the heart during this form of meditation (see also pp.238-240).

Arrangement of murtis

- After meditation, one should arrange the murtis on the separate āsana, as shown.
- This is followed by reciting the āvahān mantra – praying to Paramātmā to grace the puṇjā:

*Uttish-shtho-tishtha hey Nāth! Swāminārāyan Prabho!
Dharmasuno dayāsindho sveshām shreyaha param kuru
āgachha Bhagwān deva, svasthānāt Parameshwarā,
Aham puṇjā karishyāmi sadā twam sanmukho bhava.*



arrangement of murtis in the
nitya puṇjā

– “O Son of Dharma! O ocean of mercy! O Nath! O Swāminārāyan! O Prabhu! Please arise and redeem Your devotees. O Parameshwar! O Deva! O Bhagwān! Please come and grace my puṇjā from Your throne in Akshardhām. Please be seated in front of me. I wish to perform Your puṇjā.”

8. *Mālā* (rosary) and mantra chanting:

- By doing the darshan of the *murtis* and keeping the mind focused on them, one should do *mālā*, chanting the ‘Swāminārāyan’ mantra for every bead.
- One can perform 5, 11, 25 or more *mālās*, according to one’s devotional fervour.

9. *Tapa mālā*:

This ritual is only performed by the male *bhaktas*.

- One should then stand up on one leg and with both hands raised high, do one *mālā*.
- Whilst doing this *tapa mālā*, one should visualise Neelkanth Varni – Bhagwān Swāminārāyan performing austerities in Muktinath, in the Himalayas. Through this, one is made aware, inspired and given strength to tolerate any hardships on the path of realising Paramātmā.

10. *Pradakshinā* (circumambulation):

Then one performs *pradakshinā* of the *murtis*, whilst continuing to do the *mālā*. This involves walking clockwise around the *murtis*. Walking once around the *murtis* amounts to one *pradakshinā*. The standard is to do five or eleven *pradakshinās*. More *pradakshinās* can be done according to one’s convenience.

11. *Sāshtāng dandvat pranām* (prostration):

Sāshtāng means ‘with eight parts of the body’. *Danda* means ‘a stick’ and *vat* means ‘like’, ‘similar’. So a *dandvat* is a position similar to a stick lying on the floor. In doing *sāshtāng dandvat pranām*, one lies down flat, on the stomach, with hands outstretched in front of the body (see p.249). Six of these *dandvats* should be performed after *pradakshinā*. The sixth is to atone for, knowingly or unknowingly hurting a *bhakta* by mind, speech or physically during the previous day’s activities. This sixth *dandvat* has been advocated by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan in Vachanāmṛt Gadhadā II-40.

12. Offering *thāl* in *mānsi*:

After the *dandvat pranāms*, one re-sits in the *pujā* and offers *thāl* (*naivedya*) in *mānsi*. This means offering food to Paramātmā, visualising the food dishes that one personally relishes. Both palms should face upwards. One imagines holding a large decorative plate in front of the *murtis* containing delicious foods.



tapa mālā



pradakshinā



dandvat pranām



offering thāl in mānsi



prārthnā

13. Prārthnā

After *mānsi*, one should pray wholeheartedly with palms joined in *pranām*:

‘O Mahārāj ! O Swami ! Please protect us from the *māyā* of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. Please protect us from our *indriyas* and *antahkaran*. Please protect us from all types of *kusang* – evil company. Please inspire us so we can develop firm *ātmabuddhi* with You.’

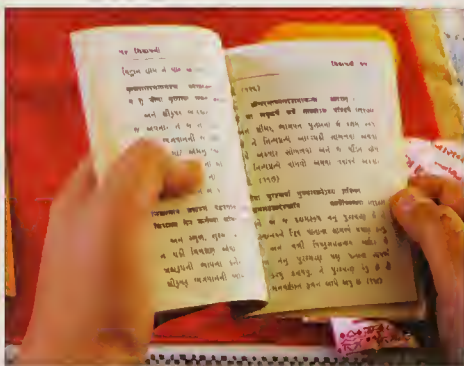
Finally one touches the *charans* (lotus-feet) of the *murtis* and brings one’s fingertips to one’s eyes. This is known as *charan sparsh*.

14. Visarjan (farewell)

- The *pujā* ends by expressing thankful sentiments to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and the *Gunātī* successors for gracing it:

|| Swasthānam gacchha devesha pujāmādāya māmakim,
Ishtakām-prasiddhyartham punarāgamanāya cha. ||

– ‘O Lord of the deities! Fulfilling my wishes for success in my day’s activities, You have blessed my *pujā*. Please resume Your seat in the altar of my heart and return tomorrow.’



reading Shikshāpatrī

15. Reading the Shikshāpatrī

- One should diligently read the *Shikshāpatrī* according to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s injunction in the *Shikshāpatrī* (208-209).
- One should read a minimum of five shlokas and think over them, aiming to imbibe them in one’s life.

Nitya *pujā* in light of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s teachings

The *Gitā* (18/54) proclaims:

|| Brahmabhutaha prasannātmā na shochati na kānkshati,
samaha sarveshu bhuteshu madbhaktim labhate parām. ||

– one who becomes *Brahmarup*, becomes eligible to offer devotion to Me.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan asserts a similar injunction :

|| Nijātmānam brahmarupam dehatraya vilakshanam,
vibhāvyatena kartavyā bhaktiḥ krishnasya sarvadā. ||

– *Shikshāpatrī* 116



– one should identify one's *ātmā* with Brahman. Then by becoming *Brahmarup*, one can worship *Purushottam Nārāyan*.

In order to realise the above injunction to become eligible to worship *Purushottam* and attain His *krupā* – grace, the *bhakta* has to attain purity in mind and body. This purity can only be achieved by becoming an *Ekāntik bhakta*. An *Ekāntik bhakta* is one who has totally imbibed all four pillars of Ekāntik Dharma – dharma, *jnān*, *vairāgya* and bhakti.

By doing *pujā* everyday, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan has given us an opportunity to realise Ekāntik Dharma. The nitya *pujā* consolidates all the four factors of Ekāntik Dharma in the following ways:

- i) dharma (religious duties) – in reading and imbibing the codes of the Shikshāpatrī.
- ii) *jnān* (knowledge) – the awareness and consolidation of the goal during *ātmachintan* and the *prārthnā* at the end.
 - in doing *pradakshinā* and mantra *japa*.
- iii) *vairāgya* (detachment) – the control of the *indriyas* by doing *prānāyāma* and the *tapa mālā*.
- iv) bhakti (devotion) – in doing *mānsi* *pujā* when we offer love and devotion to Paramātmā and in the *prārthnā* at the end when we ask for bhakti and forgiveness.

Personal nitya *pujā* and *pujā* of the *ghar mandir*

Personal nitya *pujā* has been discussed on p.227. Details of *pujā* in the *ghar mandir* are discussed in Ch.23. Both play an important role in the lives of *bhaktas*. Offering worship in the *ghar mandir* does not replace nitya *pujā*. Nitya *pujā* has to be performed in addition to the bhakti one offers in the *ghar mandir*.

In the *ghar mandir*, the collective endeavours and devotional feelings of the whole family are involved, whereas the nitya *pujā* is bhakti offered at the personal level. With the personal *pujā*, the laminated *murti* of Paramātmā can be taken by a *bhakta* wherever he goes. Therein the *pujā*'s regularity is not disturbed. But without this nitya *pujā*, when one is away from home, its regularity will be disturbed, making one prone to laxity in observing one's dharma.

Both the *ghar mandir* and the nitya *pujā* are necessary and complement each other.

Nitya puja in illness and old age

When one is totally bedridden either due to severe illness or old age, when bathing is impractical, one should give one's puja to another family member, who should perform the puja on one's behalf. One can still do *mālā*, mantra *japa* and read the Shikshāpatri. But a minor illness such as a cold is not to be regarded as a dire circumstance and one should steadfastly endeavour to do nitya puja.

Maintaining purity of puja

The puja itself is considered sacred and as such should not be kept in a place where it might be touched by feet, shoes or house pets. It should also not be placed in the kitchen. Ideally the puja should not be touched or opened again after the morning worship, until the next day.

Daily deed after nitya puja

After *puja*, one should do darshan of the *ghar* mandir and then do *panchāng pranām* to one's parents. If they are not present, then one should offer *pranām* to their photographs. To the other members of the family, one should do simple *pranām* and say "Jai Swāminārāyan."

The benefits of nitya puja

The final two decades of the 20th century witnessed great strides in the search for relaxation techniques. This came about as a result of increasing stress. One of the most famous and practicable techniques has been Dr. Herbert Benson's *Relaxation Response*, based on meditation. A cardiologist and former associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, he stumbled across this form of meditation in 1985, in a Tibetan monastery, where monks used the technique to maintain their body temperatures in freezing conditions.

The simplified technique is outlined here for the reader to compare with nitya puja. He suggests practising the technique once a day for 20 minutes to elicit the Relaxation Response.

Pick a focus word – a mantra such as, e.g. OM or 'Swāminārāyan'. Sit quietly in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and relax your muscles.

Breathe slowly and naturally, and repeat the mantra as you exhale.



panchāng pranām

Assume a passive attitude. Do not worry about how well you are doing. Disregard distractions. Let the thoughts and images pass on. Return to repeating the focus word.

Continue for ten to twenty minutes once or twice daily.

When perfected, this method brings about healthy changes in the body such as: a decrease in heart rate and blood pressure, a decrease in the rate of metabolism, decreased rate of breathing and increased blood flow to the brain by up to 25 per cent. The brain's random cycles also become even, called 'alpha' waves, which are associated with a feeling of relaxation and well-being.

This method, of the Tibetan monks seems to be similar to *nitya pujā*. The only difference is that, in *pujā* we have *murtis* present before us and we vocalise the all powerful 'Swāminārāyan' mantra. Greater than the health benefits, *nitya pujā* involves the 'Paramātmā factor'. This purifies the *antahkaran* (mind) of *vāsanā* – lust, anger, greed, ego and jealousy. Such a purified mind is capable of achieving anything in the world, including the ultimate goal of life and the supreme spiritual benefit of realising Paramātmā.



'We should bathe in the morning and then do mālā and pujā. Instead of shortening one's bathing time, we tend to cut pujā time. By shortening pujā, only we are at a loss. We should never miss pujā, and the tilak-chāndlo should be applied properly.'

'Some people complain that, 'we do not get time'. But then, how do you get time to eat? If we cannot spare even fifteen minutes or half an hour for Him who has given us 24 hours, then there's nobody more ungrateful than us.'

– Pramukh Swami Mahārāj



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj's pujā

Nitya pujā – varied facets and sentiments

Why should one face north or east during pujā?

One should face east for performing religious rituals such as pujā because the sun rises in the east. The rising sun invigorates our bodies and infuses divine attributes.

One faces north especially for religious studies because the school of all schools – the Himalayas lie to the north (for those living in India). It is itself a *Devātmā*. The goddess of learning, Saraswati also resides in the north.

In addition, for Hindus, the process of progressing upwards spiritually, is known as *Uttar Path* (उत्तर पथ). *Uttar* means north and *Path* means the way. Therefore to progress spiritually one faces northwards. The north is also a direction for stability, and one sits facing north to attain stability in life.

Tilak - chāndlo

In Indian culture, when a woman marries, in joy of getting a good husband – a guardian, she imprints a *chāndlo* on her forehead.

In the Bhakti movements of Sanātan Dharma, Paramātmā is the *Swami* (Guardian) of the *bhakta*. On being fortunate to have a guardian, the jubilant *bhakta* also imprints a *chāndlo* on his forehead. The red *chāndlo* is the auspicious (*saubhāgya*) fortune sign of meeting Paramātmā.

The head is the pride of an individual. An individual's personality lies in his thoughts and intellect. To show respect to others a man bows his head. To those whom he deeply reveres, he bows his head right down to their feet. The *bhakta*, surrenders his head – albeit himself, at the lotus feet of Paramātmā.

So a *bhakta* with loving feelings of sacrifice and surrender, symbolically imprints the 'feet' (*charan*) of his Swami on:

- i) the forehead – so that Paramātmā resides in his intellect for inspiring auspicious thoughts. The centre point of all nerves is the place between the two eyebrows on the forehead. The rishis therefore advocate the tilak to be imprinted on this central area of the head to protect it.
- ii) the upper arms, symbols of strength – that Paramātmā resides in them to inspire the *bhakta* to perform righteous acts.



imprinting tilak



imprinting chāndlo



- iii) the chest – site of the heart – symbolic of life, so that Paramātmā resides in it to inspire noble feelings.

In this way, for thoughts, feelings and karma to become auspicious, the tilak is imprinted on these four parts of the body. The tilak is also imprinted in these four positions in *smṛuti* – remembrance of the four *Vyūha* forms of Paramātmā, namely Vasudeva, Sankarshan, Aniruddha and Pradyumna (Arthadeepikā-Tika Bhashya).

This is the tilak of the Bhakti sampradāyas. Each has its own way of doing tilak. The material used is also varied. Some use ash or red clay, whilst many use sandalwood paste. In the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, the latter is used. Formerly, the *chāndlo* powder was made from lemon juice and turmeric powder. Today it is usually made from chemicals. The natural non-allergenic turmeric kumkum is also available in BAPS mandirs.

Tilak-chāndlo is the fortune sign of having met Paramātmā and of surrenderance to Him.

Origin of tilak-chāndlo in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

On Fāgan *sud* Punam Samvat 1877 (1821 CE), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan celebrated the Fuldol festival in Panchala, a town near Junāgadh in Saurashtra. The colour of the clay here was similar to that of sandalwood paste. He distributed clay tablets, each the size of a small chalk-stick, to the sadhus to use them to do tilak the next day (Fāgan *vad* 1, 13/3/1821 CE). When He saw the varied shapes and imprints of the tilak, He was amused and decided to show them the design He had in mind. He summoned Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami, and imprinted the tilak on his forehead and a round kumkum *chāndlo* in its centre. He then said, “This is our Tilak”. The tilak is a symbol of the lotus feet of Paramātmā (Bhagvad Pādākruti) and the *chāndlo* represents the *bhakta*. The *bhakta*’s ‘niche’ is at the lotus feet of Paramātmā (Arthadeepikā Tikā Bhāshya). This also represents the *Bhakta-Bhagwān* mode of worshipping Paramātmā along with His ideal devotee, the *Gunātīt* sadhu.



Benefits of tilak-chāndlo

The tilak-chāndlo signifies *dāsatva* – devotion as a servitor. Therefore, in his heart the *bhakta* has a constant awareness that, “I am the servant of Paramātmā”. Thus one attains humility in life. It is said that one who is humble is

liked by Paramātmā, and one who is liked by Paramātmā is liked by all. In addition, one is constantly inspired to observe Paramātmā's injunctions, major or minor. In case we falter, then Paramātmā can re-guide us on to the right path. We are also prevented from performing bad acts and therefore strengthened morally. Unscrupulous characters will automatically avoid us. Such a *bhakta* will not fear being ridiculed by society. On the contrary he will feel proud to be a devotee of Paramātmā. He becomes a master of his mind rather than a slave.

The collective benefits include subjugation of the base instincts, strengthening of the *ātmā*, and increased faith in Paramātmā.

It is for such reasons that in society, certain groups of people are made to wear uniforms, such as the police, the defence forces, nurses, judges and others. By wearing white clothes, the nurse does not derive inspiration to serve any better. The judge does not become any wiser by his black cloak and wig. But an external symbol like the uniform increases the awareness of one's duty and responsibility. Similarly, the *tilak-chāndlo* constantly 'whispers' an awareness in the *bhakta*, to be a true *bhakta*, a humble servitor.

What is mānsi puṇā?

There are two modes of worship. *Pratyaksh* means 'that before the eyes'. So when Paramātmā is *pratyaksh* – manifesting before us, we can worship Him by using various material offerings. But when Paramātmā is not *pratyaksh*, one can offer such materials to the *archāswarūp* – the *murti*. But in the absence of both the *archāswarūp* and material offerings, one has recourse to the *manomayi* (in the mind) *murti* with *manomayi* offerings. This is the second mode of worship known as *mānsi puṇā*. In other words, *mānsi puṇā* is the mental worship of Paramātmā.

In Vachanāmṛut Sārangpur 3, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan reveals that if *pratyaksh puṇā* and *mānsi puṇā* of Paramātmā are both offered with whole hearted adoration, intense love and humility, they are both equally fruitful.

Just as the *pratyaksh* pujā of Paramātmā is performed with *shodshopchār* materials (see Ch.4), one can do pujā with the same materials, mentally. One can mentally offer garments, ornaments, foods, fruits and drinks, according to the seasons of the year. In Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā III-23, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan gives vivid details of *mānsi* pujā during different seasons of the year. Followers of the Swāminārāyan sampradāya perform *mānsi* pujā five times during the day (see details below).

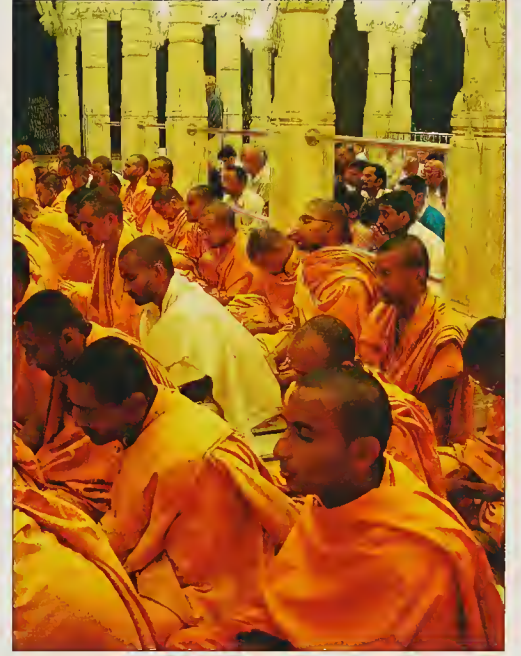
Daily mānsi pujā

Approx. time	ritual & offerings
first (morning during nitya pujā)	bathing Bhagwān, adorning <i>shanagār</i> and offering food
second (midday)	<i>rājbhog</i> ¹ , followed by <i>shayan</i>
third (4 p.m.)	<i>utthāpan</i> ² , bathing Bhagwān, fruit, nuts & juices
fourth (7.30 p.m.)	<i>sandhyā thāl</i>
fifth (8.30 p.m.)	<i>shayan</i> ³ , milk or/& water before Bhagwān retires for the night in a cosy and perfumed bed

Benefits of mānsi pujā

The added benefits of *mānsi* pujā is that it fulfils the devotional sentiments of our hearts. We are free to serve Paramātmā, the food dishes, garments and ornaments that we personally adore in any amount and variety that we like. The sky is the limit. Other benefits include:

- our worldly desires and cravings are diverted into devotional service.
- even the poor can serve rich offerings.
- Bhagwān becomes ours and He becomes like us. Then meditating on Him is easier.
- according to Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā III-23, love for the manifest form of Bhagwān increases.



mānsi pujā after sandhyā ārti in BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandirs

¹ grand offering

² awakening Bhagwān at 4 pm.

³ *shayan* – to sleep

Even at the age of 80, Shāstriji Mahārāj used to do *mānsi* pujā for 1 hour.

– Shri Yagnapurush Charitam Part I. (2007:23)

- according to Vachanāmṛut Sārangpur 3, the *manan* and *nididhyasan* (ref. glossary) necessary for realising Bhagwān are facilitated by *mānsi* puṇā.
- stability and concentration of the mind increases and hence one experiences peace of mind.

Mānsi puṇā in health & success

Medical research in the field of psychoneuro-immunology (PNI) has shed light on the effects of mental imagery or visualisation on our immune system and creativity. *Mānsi* puṇā involves mental visualisation. Today it is advocated by many Western medical scientists in healing and overcoming disease. Bernie Siegel, a cancer surgeon, in *Peace, Love and Healing* gives an example of a nine-year old boy named Garrett Porter, who had an inoperable and incurable brain tumour. Garrett resorted to visualising a ‘Star Wars’ scenario. In his mind he constructed a model, in which he was a leader of a space squadron fighting a successful battle against an invading evil planet – his tumour. Everyday he visualised that he was firing missiles at the planet. Five months later, his brain CT scans showed no evidence of tumour! No other therapy had been given. Mental visualisation alone had wiped out the tumour.

David Harp, a researcher in relaxation techniques, recommends his ‘three-minute mini-meditation’. One visualises a beautiful mountain or sea side scene, and savours the atmosphere. This is done for three minutes, and repeated five times a day. Harp claims that this relaxation technique includes the same relaxation and associated benefits as that of a single 20 minute session like Benson’s. The more vivid the imagery, the better the relaxation.

Therefore, if one incorporates this in one’s daily work schedule then the day’s stress and tension are either minimised or obviated altogether. In fact, your work becomes your play and work becomes worship.

Harp’s ‘three minute mini-meditation’ five times a day, is similar to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s ‘five *mānsis*’ cited on p.239. In addition to health benefits, Olympic champions use imagery in training and competitions. Runner James Robinson mentally rehearsed every split second of the 800

Mānsi & Creativity

Mānsi or mental visualisation helped Nicola Tesla to become one of the great inventors of the 20th century. As a child in Yugoslavia, his mother encouraged him to visualise playing games in his mind.

Later, this training helped him to learn 12 languages, develop a photographic memory and do maths as rapidly as a calculator. As an inventor, he would produce every single measurement from his mind, to 1/10,000th of an inch. This skill led him to invent the A.C. system of power generation that won him the contract to harness power from the Niagara Falls. He had 700 inventions to his credit, as well as a unit of magnetic flux density – the Tesla – named after him.

‘If you want to improve your life make a picture in your head... If you don’t make pictures in your head, there’s not going to be very much that’s easy for you.’

– Dr. Owen Caskey, former psychologist with the El Paso Independent Sch. Dist., USA.

Source: *Your Emotions & Your Health* (Padus 1986:452).

Mānsi puṇā involves visualising pictures of offerings to Bhagwān or visualising the divine episodes of His life or that of the Satpurush.

Mānsi develops right brain functions such as creativity, art, music & visual abilities.

Source: *Mānsi Puṇā for Fitness & Health. I & II* by Sadhu Mukundcharandas, in *Turning Point, Swāminārāyan Aksharpath* (2004:107-120).



metres he would run in races down to ‘the hiss of his breath and the crunch under his feet,’ hoping it would spell the difference between first and second place. Once a world champion diver, Greg Louganis visualised his dives thoroughly before jumping. In the East, visualisation plays an integral role in oriental acrobatics and martial arts such as Aikido and Kung Fu.

Mantra

When a man repeatedly thinks of something in his mind, that thought will invariably take form. “You become what you think”, is an oft heard saying. Every individual accepts some ideals to become successful or attain greater heights in his field and then repeatedly thinks on them. Businessmen strive to be the best. Children aspire to be Olympic champions or scientists. In this way, only by holding onto such precise thoughts and repeatedly drilling them, can an individual attain success. This thought can be called a mantra, defined in Sanskrit as:

Mananāt trayāte

– constant thinking or reflection on a word or phrase which uplifts, is called a mantra.

That which clarifies the goal of life is a mantra.

The phrase “Quit India” became a mantra for the Indian people. Its result was that colonial rule came to an end. The mantra took a form.

Every great person in history has adopted an ideal, a course of action and stuck to it till it bore fruit. This ideal can be termed a mantra.

These are worldly examples of a mantra. Similarly, on the spiritual path to transcend māyā, a mantra is necessary. A word or sentence which glorifies Paramātmā is a mantra.

Thinking about the glory of Paramātmā induces love for Him. Repeated vocalization of the mantra or Paramātmā’s glory is called *japa*. Constantly thinking about Him will increase His glory in our hearts. So a mantra is also regarded as Paramātmā’s form.

Gāyatri mantra

The Gāyatri mantra originates in the Rig Veda (3/62/101)

ॐ भुभुव स्व
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं ।
भर्गो देवस्य धिमही
धियो यन प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ *bhur bhuvah svaha tatsavitur varenyam
bhargo devasya dhimahi. Dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt*

– ॐ (Pranav) – Parabrahman the giver of life (*bhuhu*), remover of suffering (*bhuvah*), bestower of happiness (*svaha*), Creator of the universe (*tatsavituh*), pure (*bhargah*), of the divinity (*devasya*), contemplate (*dhimahi*), (*dhiyah*) the mind and intellect lovable (*varenyam*). We meditate on You (*dhimahi*). May You (*yah*) inspire and guide (*prachodayat*) our (*nah*) intellect (*dhiyah*).

‘O Parabrahman the bestower of life, Creator of the universe, who removes our suffering, who bestows happiness upon everyone, we meditate on You. May You inspire and guide our intellect.’

• *Gāyantam trāyate iti Gāyatri* – that which saves one on chanting, is Gāyatri (mantra and prayer combined).

• Besides being a mantra, Gāyatri is a *chhand* – type of metre. Of all the metres in the Vedas, the Gāyatri metre is the most excellent – *Gāyatri chhandasāham* – declares Shri Krishna in the Gitā (10/35).

• Only the word ‘Gāyatri’ is feminine. It is not an invocation to a female goddess, as misinterpreted by some Western authors in their books on Hinduism.

• Gāyatri is the quintessence of the three Vedas (Rig 3.62.101, Yajur 3-35, 22-9, 30-2, 36-3 and Sāma 30.6.3-10).

• There is nothing greater than the Sāvitrī (Gāyatri) mantra – *Sāvitrīyāstu param nāsti* (Manu Smṛuti 2/83).

Gāyatri mantra – meanings with reference to:

Gāyatri mantra's 3 Mahaviyahritis*	Three Loks (regions)	Vedas	Deities	Vital breath	Knowledge
bhur – <i>sat</i> (truth)	Pruthvi (earth)	Rig Veda	Agnideva (fire)	prāna	action
bhuvah – <i>chit</i> (to reflect)	Ākāsh (firmament)	Yajur Veda	Vayudev (wind)	apān	upāsānā
svah – <i>anand</i> (happiness)	Devlok	Sāma Veda	Aditya (sun)	vyān	jñān

* *viyahriti* – remover of distress.
(Source: *Gāyatri Rahasya*
1989:124-5)

Glory of Gāyatri mantra

‘Go to a forest (secluded place), be of balanced mind, sit near the water and recite the Sāvitrī (Gāyatri) mantra. Comprehend it and mould your character accordingly. This recitation should be mental’ (Manu Smṛuti 2/104).

The Taittiriya Aranyaka (2/11) says that the mystic words *bhuhu*, *bhuvah* and *svaha* are the essence of speech, and *Savitā* in the Gāyatri means ‘one who engenders glory.’ Both Atharva Veda (19.71.1) and Parāshar Smṛuti (V.1) call it *Vedamātā*. The former prays that it bestows longevity, glory, children, cattle, etc., on the singer. The Bruhadaranyak Upanishad (5.14.1-6) sings an etymological eulogy of the word Gāyatri; *gayā* means *prāna* and the root *trai* – to save. When a teacher chants the Gāyatri for his young pupil, he is saving the pupil’s life from ignorance and effects of sin.

Swāminārāyan mantra (स्वामिनारायण)

The Swāminārāyan mantra is composed of two words; *Swami* and *Nārāyan*. *Swami* represents Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami and *Nārāyan* represents Purna Purushottam Bhagwān Swāminārāyan. In the Swāminārāyan mantra, the worship (*upāsana*) of Nārāyan or Purushottam, by becoming *Swami-rup* (like *Swami*) or *Akshar-rup* is clearly enjoined. This then is the meaning of the Swāminārāyan mantra. By chanting it, one realises Bhagwān Swāminārāyan.

How should one chant a mantra?

Stability and concentration of the mind are pre-requisites for mantra chanting. After shutting out all other thoughts from the mind, one should chant the mantra for pleasing Paramātmā and for one’s own redemption only. A mind whirling with in worldly thoughts or disturbed by the base instincts will not be able to concentrate on Paramātmā. So the mind will also be unable to focus on the mantra. Its chanting will be impossible. For this, one should sit on a pure āsana in a quiet area. Withdrawing one’s *vrntti* (attention) from all material objects, then focusing the attention on the *murti* of Paramātmā, one chants the mantra, vocalizing without disturbing others.

Benefits of mantra-chanting

By faithfully chanting the mantra, glorifying Paramātmā, one pleases Him. He also fulfils any pious wishes of the *bhakta*. In the BAPS sampradāya, it is common knowledge that when Yogiji Mahārāj was bitten by a cobra in Gondal mandir, his guru Shāstriji Mahārāj instructed all the *bhaktas* present to chant the Swāminārāyan mantra. The effects of the

स्वामिनारायण

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan first gave the Swāminārāyan Mahamantra to devotees in Faneni, Saurashtra on Mahā vad II, Āshādh Samvat 1858 (31/12/1801 CE).



Examples of mantras:

- Hari Rām, Rām Rām Hare Hare Hare, Hare Krishnā, Hare Krishnā, Hare Hare
(Kalisantaran Upanishad)
- Rāma Krishna Hari – by followers of Vithobā, Pandharpur.
- Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rām, Hare Rām, Rām Rām, Hare Hare – by followers of Shri Gaudiya Sampradāy, Bengal.
- Om Namo Bhagvate Vāsudevāya (Bhāgvatam)
- Gāyatri mantra see pp.241-242
- Om Rām Rāmāya Namah
- Om ham Hanumate Namah
- Om gam Ganapate Namah

From whom should one receive a mantra?

A person who is self-realised or the Satpurush who has realised Bhagwān is eligible to give a mantra for the spiritual progress of an aspirant.

Question posed by Gulzarilal Nanda (interim Prime Minister of India on two occasions) to Shāstriji Mahārāj.

'By doing mālā, dhyāna, etc., how does one know that they have been successful?'

Shāstriji Mahārāj, 'One's vritti (consciousness) detaches from the mundane world and remains attached to Bhagwān. That is the fruit of such sādhanā. To master this, one also needs vairāgya & practice. Mālā and dhyāna are for practising to keep the vritti on Bhagwān.'

-- Dave, H.T. (1995 II:35)



mālā of tulsi wood



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj chants 51 mālās in his daily morning puja.

poison soon subsided. Without any side effects, Yogiji Mahārāj resumed his activities the very next day.

The body also benefits in other ways. The troubled mind is calmed. When this happens, its effects reverberate throughout the whole body. Relaxation occurs at all levels.

An individual with a calm mind will also have great mental stability and poise. Decisions made with such a mind help a man progress in life. This helps establish peace and harmony with friends and relatives. In contrast, bad decisions, made by a tense and anxious mind will entail an endless series of problems in life. So mantra chanting provides both material and spiritual benefits.

Mālā

Our busy daily schedule and laziness prevent us from remembering Paramātmā even once during the day. Then, the sadhus convince us to remember Paramātmā once... five times.. eleven times a day. A need then arises for keeping a count on the number of mantra *japas* performed. The count also develops a feeling of contentment that one has performed one's fixed number of *japas* daily. As a result, for easy counting, the *mālā* has come into being.

108 beads in a mālā

In one *pal*, one breathes six times. Two and a half such *pal* equal one minute. Therefore a man's average number of breaths is fifteen per minute, and 900 in one hour. Therefore, in 24 hours, according to the shāstras, there will be 21,600 breaths. This is revealed in the Chudamani Upanishad (32/33);

*Shat shatāni divārātro sahasranyekavinshatihi;
Etatsankyātmakam mantra jivo japati sarvadā.*

It is arbitrarily taken that we are awake for twelve hours and asleep for twelve hours. During the twelve hours of the day, we breathe 10,800 times (discounting the twelve hours of the night). The *bhakta* would ideally like to chant Paramātmā's name at every breath. Because this is not practical, the shāstras have prescribed the *upānshu* method. In

this, the fruit of every mantra is multiplied a 100 fold and so during the day, 108 mantras are to be chanted whose fruits will amount to 10,800 – equivalent to the number of breaths taken.

Upānshu syāt shatagunaha

– Manu Smruti 2/86

In this way, turning one *mālā* of 108 beads, is equivalent to chanting Paramātmā's name at every breath. With this sentiment in mind, the rishis assigned 108 beads in a *mālā*.

Another school of thought bases the number 108 on the arrangement of the universe. The sun and moon play a vital role in the life of man. The seasons occur as a result of their movements. The ancient rishis divided the sun's motion into 27 asterisms. The name *nakshatra* is used to describe the group of stars in each of these 27 asterisms. The *japa mālā* came to be based on the series of these 27 *nakshatras*. Each *nakshatra* is subdivided into four sections called *charan* (feet). So in the 27 *nakshatras* there are 108 *charans*. Therefore the number of beads assigned to a *mālā* is 108.

Where two ends of the series of *nakshatra* meet, that area of the cosmos is known as 'Mount Sumeru'. In the same manner, *sumeru* is the name given to the largest bead; of a different shape, which joins the two ends of the *mālā* (see p.246).

How to do a *mālā*

The *mālā* is held on the middle finger of the right hand. The middle finger of the right hand is used because it is connected with the heart by a *nādi* (subtle meridian). The shāstras proclaim the heart as the main site for Paramātmā to reside in a man's body.

Hrudi tishtadashāngulam

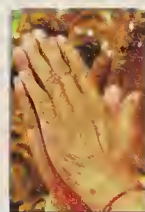
– Yajur Veda 31

Therefore the *mālā* is held and moved on the middle finger to influence the heart. The *mālā* is not fruitful if held in the left hand. The beads are moved towards oneself, by the thumb, one by one. The forefinger should not touch the

'Shāstriji Mahārāj used to do 200 *mālās* everyday.'

Hakā Khāchar to Gulzārīlāl Nandā, 10/3/1948.

– Swāminārāyan Prakāsh, March 1998



carving *mālā* beads from a tulsi trunk using traditional techniques. 108 beads for one *mālā* takes about one hour to carve!
(see tulsi *mālā* on opposite page)



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj showing a group of children how to do *mālā*, after a drama



beads. For every bead moved, one should utter 'Swāminārāyan'. One chants the Swāminārāyan mantra 108 times during one *mālā*. When the *Sumeru* is reached, one should not let it pass like the other beads, but the *mālā* should be reversed at this point. Therefore one actually re-starts turning the *mālā* with the last bead of the previous round.

Sumeru

The *nakshatras* travel in the heavens keeping the *sumeru* as the epicentre. The *sumeru* remains stationary. The *mālā* is a symbolic representation of the *nakshatra* series of stars. A similar importance is attached to the *sumeru* of a *mālā*. When the *sumeru* is reached, the devotee touches it and then reverses the direction of the *mālā* and resumes the mantra chanting.

FAQ

Why do some people wear the *mālā* around the neck?

To maintain the purity of a *mālā*. It is ideally placed in a cloth bag called a *gaumukhi*. The right hand fits loosely into the *gaumukhi* and the *mālā* is then turned. After doing *mālā*, it is put away along with the *gaumukhi*. But in the *gaumukhi*'s absence, some people wear the *mālā* around the neck, rather than carrying it in one's pockets where it can repeatedly come in contact with all sorts of items, like sweets, currency, handkerchief, and so on.

There are health benefits of the *mālā* according to the Ayurvedic *shāstras*. If the beads are made from tulsi, sandalwood or rudrāksh, they can radiate their medicinal properties in the neck region to prevent or treat thyroid disorders. The rudrāksh *mālā* is also famed for its healing effects on heart disease.

Tapa *mālā*

Tapas means austerities. By doing *tapa*, the *indriyas* (sense organs) are controlled and their energies are sublimated, onto a higher, spiritual plane. In any field, success results only from self-restraint and therefore *tapa* is an important factor. A person who is constantly indulging in worldly pleasures cannot hope to reach the heights of success. Even astronauts travelling into space or mountain climbers wishing to scale Mount Everest or other sportsmen, have to undergo rigorous training – involving both mental and



gaumukhi of the Gaudiya sampradāya



Shaivite sadhu with a gaumukhi

physical restraints such as: eating and drinking in moderation or foregoing food, water or sleep for many days, lifting weights, running, etc. The body is purposely subjected to intensive training and self-abnegation. For example in some world class sporting events, celibacy is also practised prior to competition. In short, to reach a higher goal one has to sacrifice some sensual pleasures. This is the modern equivalent of *tapas*.

The *bhakta* who is determined with zeal, “to realise Paramātmā, at any cost, come what may,” will also keep his mind controlled and subject himself to self-abnegation.

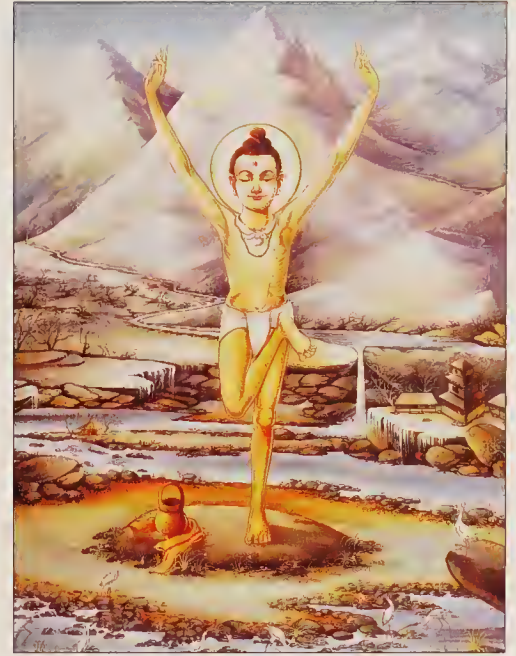
Usually, during mantra *japa* one sits in the yogic postures of either *siddhāsana* or *padmāsana* or simply cross-legged. Mantra *japa* is the consolidation of one’s goal to realise Paramātmā. With this awareness, one stands on one leg, raising both hands high and does the *mālā*. This is known as *tapa mālā*. It represents the above sentiments of the staunch *bhakta*, of attaining Paramātmā at any cost disregarding any pain or tribulation. Another sentiment also prevails in the Satsang.

When Bhagwān Swāminārāyan left home at the age of eleven, and travelled through the forests of India as Neelkanth, he performed austerities standing on one leg for over two months in Mukthanath, high in the inhospitable ranges of the Himalayas. The *bhaktas* reminisce this episode, empathising with Neelkanth when doing the *tapa mālā* in *nitya pujā*.

Pradakshinā (circumambulation)

Cirumambulation has an interesting history in the world’s cultures. It was practised by the Greeks, Romans, Celts and the Gauls. Among the last two, it was the custom of going around an individual who was considered holy. The Irish people, even today, when burying their dead, walk at least once, sometimes three times, around the graveyard, ‘sunwise’ with the coffin. The Roman Catholic Church also uses it in the consecration of churches and in the enthroning of bishops. The Latins call it ‘dextratio’ and perform this in marriages. Muslims walk several times around the Ka’ba at Mecca and Christians perform the same ritual around the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem.

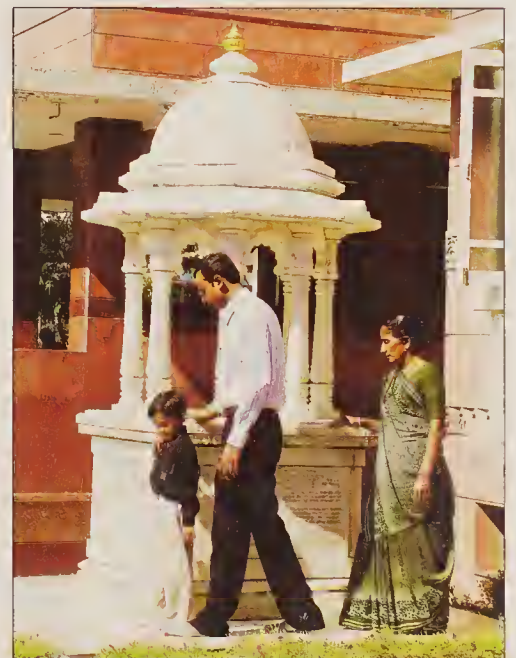
In the Shatapath Brāhman, the *pradakshinā* represents the daily march of the sun, rising in the east, travelling south



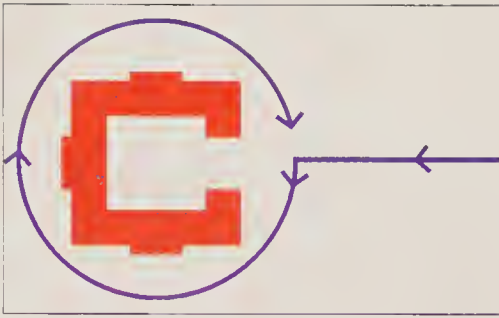
Neelkanth Varni performing tapas in Muktinath, Nepal



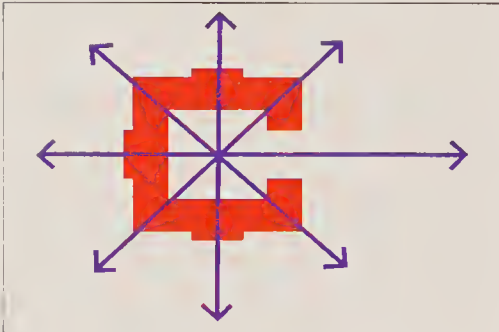
children doing tapa mālā during nitya pujā



pradakshinā of a shrine



The approach to the garbha gruha and the circumambulatory passage and the circumambulation around it in a clockwise direction.



Outward radiation of divine energy from the centre of the garbha gruha.

(Source: *The Hindu Temple*, George Michell 1977:66-67)

Circumambulating deities (in the garbha gruha), a mandir or a shrine (see previous page), such as that consecrated with the lotus-footprints of Bhagwān, charges a person spiritually.



devotee offering pranām in a mandir in Jaipur.

and then setting in the west. When the brahmin pundits perform *pradakshinā* they utter the sentiments, ‘Sunwise, let this sacred work of ours be accomplished,’ and then walk three times around sunwise.

Incidentally, circumambulation in the reverse direction is called *prasavya* in Sanskrit – walking anti-clockwise, which is considered unholy.

Pradakshinā is a form of *pujā*, of reverence. In ancient times, man used to dance in a circular motion around his favourite friend to show his respect and joy on meeting him. Similarly, the chosen leader of a group would be placed in the centre of a circle and the others would dance around him. We witness this even today.

The greatest leader is Bhagwān. He is the epicentre of all activity. To offer respect, to convey one’s joy in meeting Him, He is kept in the centre and man circumambulates Him. This is *pradakshinā*.

In life, if Bhagwān is kept in the centre of any activity, then no obstacle is insurmountable.

In the *Mahābhārat*, Veda Vyās has given the same meaning to *pradakshinā*. Whoever has kept Bhagwān as his guide in life, has always attained success. Whenever the Pāndavas kept Shri Krishna as their guide, they were successful. But when they gambled, they did not heed Shri Krishna’s advice and paid dearly, losing their kingdom and prestige in the process.

Whilst performing *pradakshinā* one should constantly pray to Bhagwān, ‘O Mahārāj! Please remain the epicentre of all my activities.’ In return, His *bhaktas*, should promise Him that, ‘in life we will keep You and the *Gunātī* sadhu in the epicentre of all our activities.’

One should do eleven or more *pradakshinās* during the morning *pujā*. *Pradakshinā* of *murtis* in mandirs is also a common ritual. Yogiji Mahārāj invariably advocated devotees in pain or distress to faithfully perform 51,101 or more *pradakshinās* of Akshar Deri, BAPS’s most sacred and miraculous shrine, at the mandir in Gondal. This invariably solaced them.

Doing only one *pradakshinā* or one *dandvat* is considered inauspicious and insulting to the Deity.



Pranām

Generally, when two people meet, the western mode of greeting is to shake hands and say, 'How do you do?' or 'Pleased to meet you,' or plain 'Hello'.

In Sanātān Dharma, one does not shake the other person's hands, but brings one's palms together, in *pranām*. One also simultaneously bows one's head slightly, to pay respect to the person opposite. At the same time the name of Paramātmā or a deity is always spoken e.g. *Jai Shri Krishna*, *Jai Shri Rāma*, *Jai Swāminārāyan*, *Jai Nārāyan*, or *Jai Ambe*. This is the simple *pranām*, also known as *namaskār*.

Dandvat pranām

To show one's insignificance and respect towards Bhagwān and His Sadhu, one does *dandvat pranām*, wherein one lies down prostrate on the floor with arms outstretched towards the *murtis*. *Danda-vat* means like a stick lying on the floor.

Sāshtāng dandvat pranām

Ashtāng means eight parts. *Sāshtāng* means, with eight parts. In this type of *pranāms*, the eight parts of the body which should touch the floor are:

*Oorasā shirasā drushtyā manasā vachasā tathā padabhyām
karābhyām jānubhyām pranāmo - shtāngam muchyate*

– (i) *jānubhyām* – thighs, (ii) *padabhyām* – feet, (iii) *karābhyām* – hands, (iv) *urasā* – chest, (v) *manasā* – mind, (vi) *shirasā* – head, (vii) *vachasā* – speech, (viii) *drushtyā* – eyes.

– Āhanik Sutrāvali

Since all of man's karmas (actions) are performed either by the mind, or the body or by speech and since every karma in life should be offered to Bhagwān, the mind and speech are also included in the eight parts during *sāshtāng dandvat pranām*. The male members offer these *pranāms* to Bhagwān, the guru and sadhus.

Panchāng pranām

Panchāng means five parts of the body: (i) head, (ii) hands, (iii) feet, (iv) mind and (v) speech.



*dandvat pranāms in Akshar Deri,
Gondal, Saurashtra*

Glory of one true dandvat pranām:

*Eko-pi Krushnasya kratah pranāmo
dashāshvamedhāvabhruthenatulya,
dashāshvamedhi punareti janma
Krushnapranāmi na punarbhavāya.*

– Pāndava Gitā

– even one *pranām* offered to Bhagwān Shri Krishna is equal to *avabhruth* bathings performed in ten *Ashwamedha yagnas*. However, rebirth remains after the *Ashwamedha yagnas*, whereas it ceases after *pranām* to Bhagwān.



panchāṅg pranām to parents



pranāms and dandvat pranāms to Bhagwān are regarded as dāsatva bhakti, the seventh in the nine forms of devotion known as Navdhā Bhakti (see Ch.12). It represents humility and surrenderance.

Males offer *panchāṅg pranāms* to parents and either *panchāṅg* or *ashtāṅg pranāms* to sadhus. Females offer only *panchāṅg pranām* to Bhagwān, *murtis* and parents.

For males, if restricted space prevents *dandvat pranāms*, then *panchāṅg pranāms* can equally be offered. In both forms, the person doing the *pranāms*, while still on the floor should touch the feet of the revered one, then bring the sanctified hands to one's eyes. This is known as *charan sparsh* – touching feet. The sentiment underlying *charan sparsh* is that one's whole self is sanctified or blessed by the holiness of the person being touched.

Benefits of dandvat pranām

Dandvat pranām involves three yogic postures:

(i) *Namaskārāsan*, (ii) *Prasārānāsan* (one foot) and (iii) *Bhujangāsan*.

These help relieve backache and increase the flexibility of the spinal column. The muscles of the neck, shoulders, chest and lower back are toned. It increases efficiency of the pancreas and adrenals and helps prevent diabetes.

By monitoring the effects on blood pressure, mental poise and hormone levels, medical researchers have discovered that the *dandvat pranām* posture has the greatest effect in maintaining an internal equilibrium.

When a man becomes angry, harmful chemicals are released and nervous changes occur in the body and the brain. Ego is the cause of this anger. By doing *dandvat pranām* one's ego diminishes. Subsequently one's anger also lessens gradually. The ultimate aim is to remove ego completely. *Dandvat pranām* helps to achieve this and will result in mental peace as well as gaining physical benefits.

Prārthnā

Prārthnā is a silent dialogue between *bhakta* and Bhagwān. It is a conversation full of loving feelings and sentiments coming from the heart of the *bhakta*. To acknowledge these feelings, we sometimes resort to the use of words. Since ancient times, man has formed a link with Bhagwān by *prārthnā*. *Prārthnā* means to have a yearning to meet Bhagwān, by surrendering to Him, by having implicit faith, love and *dāsatva* – humility towards Him.

In the Shrimad Bhāgavatam (8/2,3,4), the story of Gajendra – the distressed elephant – attaining succour, is well-known. Bhagwān Vishnu incarnated on Earth specially to free him from the crocodile's clutches.

What factors can be included in *prārthnā*?

Having grasped the real meaning of *prārthnā* this question does not arise. All feelings coming from the heart, of love and servitude towards Paramātmā, are collectively termed *prārthnā*. *Prārthnā* by great sadhus and *bhaktas* of the past may also reflect and enhance our own feelings.

Yogiji Mahārāj's famous and sublime *prārthnā* in Mahelav, the birth place of his Guru Shāstriji Mahārāj, is a landmark in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya. It inspires *bhaktas* to be introspective of their feelings towards Paramātmā and the *satsang*.

There is another famous *prārthnā* in the Sampradāy. During a Fuldol *utsav* in Sārangpur, Saurashtra, the women devotees of Gujarat offered a unique *prārthnā* to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, which is versified in the Bhaktachintāmani (Ch. 64). It begins:

“*Mahābalwanta māyā tamāri, jene āvariya naranāri...*”

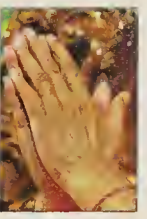
– You, who have delivered us from the great darkness of māyā.

The women's *prārthnā* reflects the feelings of what the ideal *bhakta* should request from Paramātmā.

In Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā I-48; Bhagwān Swāminārāyan shows us how to pray:

O Mahārāj! Protect us from our inner foes – the instincts of lust, anger, greed, temptation, ego and jealousy, and grant us the company of your devotees.

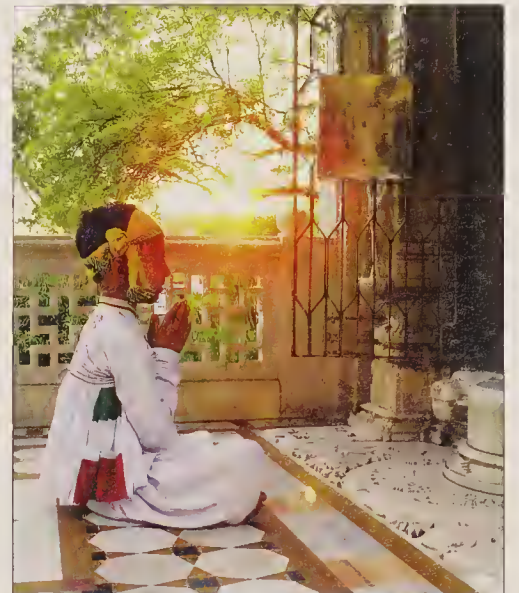
O Mahārāj! O Swami! O Krupāsindho! O Sharnāgat Pratipālak! Deliver us from evil company.



Gajendra's heartfelt prārthnā to Vishnu to save him from a crocodile (stone sculpting in the Gajendrapith, Swāminārāyan Akshardhām, New Delhi.



devotees offering prārthnā



young devotee offering prārthnā

Prayer & healing in the lab

According to researchers, humans present many variables which cannot be controlled or measured in the lab. For example how can they judge the sincerity of somebody praying for healing in the lab? Hence we consider results of healing involving non-humans and let readers decide what to believe about praying.

- Ten people tried to stop growth of fungus cultures in the laboratory, by concentrating on them for 15 minutes at a distance of about 1 metre. The cultures were then incubated. Out of 194 cultures 151 showed retarded growth.
- Sixty people, who were not healers, were able both to arrest and stimulate significantly the growth of bacterial cultures.
- Dr. Bernard Grad of McGill University in Canada, devised experiments to study the success of a healer named Oskar Estebany.

In one experiment, Estebany held the cage of mice, which had skin patches removed surgically. He held the cage for 15 minutes twice daily for a fortnight. This group of mice healed faster than wounded mice whose cages were not held.

- In another experiment, Estebany held some cotton in his hands, which he then placed inside a cage with rats who had artificially induced goitre – enlarged thyroid. The cotton was placed in the cage for one hour twice a day for 6 days a week. The thyroid glands of rats receiving this 'treatment' grew far more slowly than the controls. They even returned to normal size more quickly after giving them an iodine-rich diet.

This indirect effect, through a material such as cotton, is a similar phenomenon to that of Pramukh Swami Mahārāj giving sanctified water or rose petals to devotees

In Vachanāmrut Gadhadā III-39, he adds: 'Deliver us from the māyā of 'I' and 'mine' and bless us to increase our love for You. Also, grant us the boon to associate with and love the Sadhu who has overcome māyā and who loves You.'

The things we should NOT pray for

Since the *bhakta* should not wish for even the four types of *mukti* – liberation, he should obviously not wish for material or bodily comforts which are ephemeral. After surrendering his mind, body and possessions to Paramātmā, he firmly believes that his *prārabdha* (fate) lies in His will. He continues to offer devotion with joy, believing that any episodes of pain or happiness are the result of Bhagwān's will. For the ideal devotee, the goal is Paramātmā only, not mundane objects or happiness.

Nevertheless, on occasions when a *bhakta* is overwhelmed with worldly misery, to prevent himself from slipping into a lower, sinful path, he can pray for succour to Paramātmā – his Swami (Vachanāmrut Vartāl 5). But one should not expect Paramātmā's answer to comply with one's wishes. It is important to freely accept Paramātmā's actions after having prayed.

Benefits of prārthnā

Praying deepens our love for Paramātmā and strengthens pious feelings in our hearts. Love has forever learnt to give, not to ask. As this selfless love develops, simultaneously the feelings of *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* – the whole world is my family – develop. Our inner instincts of pride, jealousy and hate, are erased. Consequently, not only do we experience peace, but physical illnesses resulting from internal, mental discord either abate or disappear completely.

Modern research into the effects of *prārthnā* have revealed interesting results. Dr. Randy Byrd, a cardiologist at the University of California at San Francisco, conducted an experiment on 393 I.C.C. patients. He divided them into two groups. One group was prayed for, unknown to the patients in that group. The other group remained as it is – a control. All other factors remained the same for both groups. The results showed that the group that was prayed for, did better in three ways: the need for antibiotics, the need for intubation and the



incidence of pulmonary oedema (fluid accumulation in the lungs), all decreased markedly.

In *Every Man's Search*, Rebecca Beard cites the case of a female patient suffering from arthritis. She was troubled by her husband's poor English pronunciations. The physician treating her, prayed for her and also asked her to pray for relief from the disease in the following manner: 'O Lord! I will not tell my loved ones to do things my way. I will not expect them to obey and follow my instructions. Give me the strength to only love my dear ones. I will not expect them to follow my beliefs.' The woman was subsequently cured of her arthritis.

In this way *prārthnā* subdues the inner foes and this in turn circumvents the physical illnesses – whose roots are the inner foes. A greater benefit is that family quarrels and social antagonism dissolve.

Thus, there are benefits at the individual and social levels. The seeds for world peace can be sown by *prārthnā*.

Yogiji Mahārāj's *prārthnā* in Mahelāv is replete with sayings about avoiding fault-finding and talking pessimistically. He implores devotees to always talk and think optimistically, extolling Paramātmā's glory. The prayer exudes with exuberant love for Paramātmā. This reflects his saintly and sublime state. By loving Paramātmā we experience the bliss of His divine abode – Akshardhām, here and now, and not just after death.

The true prayer gushes spontaneously from the *ātmā*. It does not require effort. It exudes freely from within.

Does *prārthnā* solve problems?

'That depends on one's faith. By having faith and keeping up one's efforts the problem will be solved. The prayer is truthful. The one being prayed to is also the Truth. One should have faith that Bhagwān can see and hear the prayers of countless. One should have faith in whom one is praying to. We lose faith very easily. In this age of technology we expect that everything should happen instantly. But after what efforts was Edison successful in inventing the light bulb? We are aiming to become brahma-rup here. For that, one should pray faithfully. Bhagwān is the all-doer. Have faith. He will do the rest.'

– Pramukh Swami Mahārāj

who are suffering from illnesses or any meta-physical problems. The water and rose petals are from his morning pujā, sanctified by: (i) his own touch (ii) roses offered in pujā to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan & guru paramparā (iii) immersing a mālā bead, a piece of cloth, and other holy relics of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, in a jug of water: This water is then mixed into a larger vessel of water, from which small bottles are filled. These are given by Pramukh Swami Mahārāj to devotees during personal counselling.

In his book Healing Words, Dr. Larry Dossey concludes with several predictions for medicine. One of them is, 'The use of prayer will become the standard in scientific medical practice in most medical communities' (1993:205).

(Source: Healing Words by Larry Dossey (1993:190).

Reading Shikshāpatrī



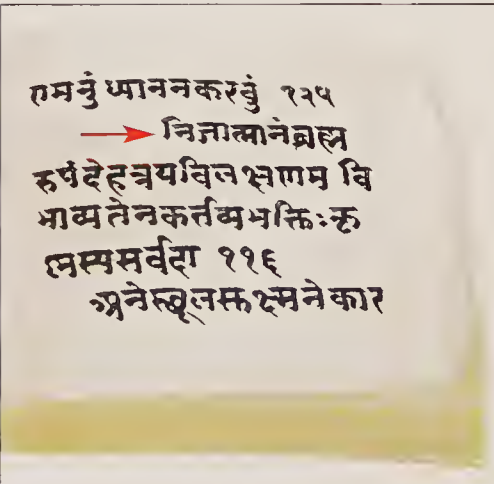
*Shikshāpatrī in the Bodleian Library,
in the Oriental Institute, Oxford*

*Shāstriji Mahārāj used to read 51
shlokas of the Shikshāpatrī during
pujā.*

Every commercial product has a ‘how to use’ manual. Problems can arise if the instructions are not followed carefully. Even a common household item like a pressure cooker, can cause serious injury if used without following the instruction manual. What would be the result if we were to walk on the roads without knowing the traffic regulations? Accidents. Similarly, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan has given a set of codes to guide mankind through life without having accidents and without causing harm to others as well. These ‘do’s’ – ritual and the ‘don’ts’ – *nishedh* of living, are given in the Shikshāpatrī. Therefore it needs to be read carefully, like an instruction manual.

In Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā III–1, and in the Shikshāpatrī (208), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan gives an injunction to devotees, to read the Shikshāpatrī daily. Failing that, in case one is illiterate, then one should ask someone to read it aloud. If this is not possible either, then one should worship it by doing its puja everyday.

The question may arise, that after having understood the codes, what is the need to read them everyday? However it must be borne in mind, that the Shikshāpatrī is a sacred shāstra – a dharma *granth* and an *āchār samhitā* – code of conduct. Dharma is a concept that has to be imbibed in one’s life; to be lived and this is quite a challenging task. Even though one may know the laws, one may not be able to practice them perfectly. One often slips due to temptation. Therefore only by daily reading, hearing and thinking on the codes and rules can one really imbibe them in one’s life. Only then can one practice them with ease. Even the person who has realised dharma in its entirety, observes the codes for the sake of others and will not break the rule of reading the Shikshāpatrī daily.



*The most important injunction of the
Shikshāpatrī (116), indicated in red.
(scribed copy on handmade paper;
mid-19th century)*

By reading it daily, one is made aware to obey the codes. This will eradicate our base instincts. It inspires us to progress higher on the path of devotion. This results in peace at heart.



FAQs

1. If feelings are more important than the actual rituals themselves, then what is the need for performing such rituals?

For the aspirant – *sādhak* – who has still to fully kindle and consolidate his *bhāvnā* (feelings) towards Paramātmā, and to maintain their continuity, all these practices need to be observed.

A *sādhak* who has become a *siddha* will never choose to disregard any trivial injunction. The reason for this is given in the shāstras – that of never trusting the mind:

*Na kuryātkarhichit sakhyam manasi hi anawasthite,
Yad - vishrambhāt chirāt chiranam chaskanda tapa aishwaram.
Nityam dadati kāmasya chidram tamanu yerayaha,
yoginaha krutamaitrasya patyurjayeva punschali.*

– Bhāgvatam 5/6/3-4

– the mind being hyperactive is forever unstable. Therefore one should never trust it, such that, ‘I have conquered it and it will do me no harm’.

‘A yogi who trusts his mind, gives lust a free chance to enter it. Then anger and similar inner foes also invade the mind. It is like a man who trusts his unfaithful wife – who betrays him by conspiring with a lover. Similarly the mind, invaded by lust, anger and other foes, destroys the yogi.’

Even deities and great rishis such as Saubhari, who had with great effort performed great *tapas* (austerities) were ruined by trusting the mind.

In addition, after becoming a *siddha* – God-realised – all the observances should still be followed for the sake of others. The Gitā (3/21) echoes:

*Yadyadācharati shreshthaha tadtadevetaro janaha,
Sa yatpramānam kurute lokastadanuvartate.*

– people will follow in the footsteps of great men. So any practice of a great person will generally be blindly followed by the common masses.

After building and consecrating the first of six Vedic mandirs in 1822, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan himself used to rush for darshan and perform a hundred dandvats and pradakshinās each.

– Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami in Swāmini Vāto 12/168

Being Parabrahman Purushottam, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan performed daily pujā in the morning, including 5 dandvat pranāms. Once in 1824, he did 6 dandvats; ‘to atone for any mistake in hurting a bhakta knowingly or unknowingly by thought, word or deed’.

– Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā II-40

Therefore, if the *siddha* or a great spiritual personality himself avoids the rituals and injunctions, then the novices will also take cue and avoid them. Ultimately, this will harm the novices.

In reality, after these rituals have been perfected, they do not feel burdensome. In fact, they become ingrained in one's self. The thought to ignore or transgress them does not arise.

As long as the rituals feel burdensome, a chore, the feelings will never fructify. One who does not want to observe them, nor walk on the true path, will try to exhibit his intellectual ability by regarding these rituals as useless and hypocritical. He will disregard and discard them. But one who has attained success in his own field, whatever it may be, will closely observe even minute rules and rituals and never spurn them. Even the world's best musicians or sportsmen never miss a single day's practice nor relax their stringent daily routines. Scientists are probably the most meticulous. They strive to prevent the slightest mistake in their research. Why? Because the results of their experiments would be authentic. Laws are either result-oriented or feeling-oriented. In the latter, the effects cannot be seen directly from the result. But its effects though invisible, are nevertheless real. In a battle, is it not enough for a soldier to know how to fight bravely? What then, is the need for a special uniform? He does not need to march during battle. Why then does he practice marching everyday during peacetime? Is it absolutely necessary to salute a commander to show one's respect? Can one not have respect for him in one's heart? Yet all these 'rituals' and practices discipline the soldier. The result is that under even the most critical circumstances, the soldier will never break discipline or disobey orders. Only then can the whole army collectively attain victory.

To awaken the *sādhak's* sentiments, to attain and perpetuate their stability, spiritual codes are a must. For those who have attained perfection or become *siddhas*, the need to observe codes still exists, in order to establish an ideal for others to follow.



2. Why is a morning bath preferable rather than one in the evening?

All staunch Hindus bathe in the morning. The Dharma Shāstras advocate a daily morning bath, known as *nitya prātaḥ snān* for everybody (Baudhāyan Dharma Sutras 2/4, 4, Manu Smṛuti 2/176, 4/82). This obligatory bath should be with cold water and not hot water (Shankha 8/9-10, Dakṣha 2/64). This is to secure invisible spiritual merit.

The young, ill or aged may use hot water. A bedridden person may rub a wet piece of cloth, known as *kapil snān*.

The Manu Smṛuti (2/176) stipulates an evening bath in addition to the morning bath. The reasons for *prātaḥ snān* are:

(1) Night sleep renders impurity to the mind-body complex. In the body this is in the form of discharges from the nine orifices and other wastes dumped in the blood and other organs. The mind (*sukshma sharir*) is polluted by bad dreams and karmas resulting from *rajo-guna*. Only a total immersion of the body with water in the morning cleanses the body and purifies the mind. Without a bath purity of thoughts is not possible:

nairmālyam bhāvaśuddhishcha vinā snānam na jāyate

– Bhaviṣya Purāna, Uttar Khand 123/1-3

The Viśhwāmitra Smṛuti (1/86) says that bathing endows a person with ten virtues: beauty (*rup*), lustre (*tej*), strength (*bāl*), piety purity (*pavitratā*), longevity (*āyushya*), destroying bad dreams, valour (*nirbhaytā*), austerity (*tapas*) and intelligence (*medhā*).

(2) Only after such ritual purification with water, is the body eligible for the morning religious rituals such as *pujā*, *japa* and *ārti* (Bruhad Yājñavalkya Smṛuti 7/121, Dakṣha Smṛuti 2/9):

*Prātaḥsnānam prashamsanti drashtādroshṭakaram hi tat
sarvamarhati śuddhātmā prātaḥsnāyi japādikam.*

Prātaḥ snān

● *Prātaḥ snān* means a having a bath immediately prior to sunrise – *suryodayāt prāk kālah*. The *śāstras* enjoin having a bath by looking at the eastern horizon while dawn is breaking.

– Viśhnu dharmasutras 64/8,
Sankarshan Samhitā 1/57

● A ritual bath invariably means a complete immersion or dip in water (*majjana*, *avagāhana*). This means wetting the head. The most meritorious bath is one in a river, stream, canal, pond and well.

– Chintyāgama 4,3-5

● A bath in an ocean confluence (*samudra sangam*) is incomparably superior to any of the above.

– Diptāgama 55,2-4

● One should not rub the body in the water reservoir, but outside, on the bank of the river or pond.

● One should not splash the water with one's foot or hand, nor splash a portion of water against the rest of the water.

● However when these sources are not available or convenient, the *Matanga-Parameshvara* text (*kriyāpāda*) advocates a bath at home. But one should try to face east at the rising sun.

● One should not bathe after a meal.

– Manu Smṛuti 4/29

(3) Water boosts the body's prāna and *prānic* field. The Shrutis state that: *āpo vai prānaha* – water itself is prāna. Hence a morning rinse with water infuses *chetnā* (energy) in the body. A body suffused with such energy is able to function better. It removes the morning sluggishness and lethargy.

An evening bath is an added 'extra' but not an alternative. This question arises only for those influenced by the West. Those who sincerely wish to observe this ritual can do so anywhere in the world.

In the Shikshāpatri (49-50), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan also enjoins having a daily bath in the morning.

3. Why should one wear a garment while bathing?

The shāstras advocate wearing a lower garment while bathing, since bathing naked is an insult (*aparādh*) to Varuna, the water deity (Gautam Smruti 10/16, Manu Smruti 4/45).

The shāstras of Dharma and Ayurveda, Purāns and Mahābhārat unanimously and emphatically forbid bathing naked:

|| *na nagnah snānamācharet* ||

– Manu Smruti 4/45, Baudhāyan Smruti 2/3/51, Kurma Purāna, Uttarkhand 16/65, Padma Purāna, Swarg 55/65, Agni Purāna 155/22.

|| *na nagnah pravishejjalam* ||

– Sushrut Samhitā, Chikitsāsthān 24/100

|| *na nagna upasprushet* ||

– Charak Samhitā, Sutrasthān 8/19

|| *na nagnah snātumarhati* ||

– Mahābhārat, Anushāsan Parva 104/67

One must wet one's head while bathing. Deva pujā and pitru karmas can only be performed after bathing by wetting the head (Vāman Purāna 14/53, Mahābhārat, Anushāsan Parva 104/125, Shāndilya Smruti 2/57, Manu Smruti 4/82).

Naimittik snān

The shāstras also enjoin having a bath after shaving, hair-cutting, copulation, touching a dead body or evil person, bad dreams and sutak – ritual purificatory bath after the birth of a baby and death of a family member.

– Kāmikāgam, Purva, 3/111, Manu Smruti 5/85

One should bathe after a bad dream, shaving/hair cutting, vomiting, fornication and visiting a cemetery.

– Bruhat Parāshar Smruti 8/271, Parāshar Smruti 12/1, Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna 34/82-83, Vishnu Smruti 22



After bathing, one should not wear unwashed clothes, which have been worn previously (Vishnu Smruti 64).

4. What should one chant while bathing?

While bathing, the *shāstras* advocate recalling Bhagwān Nārāyan (Laghu Vyās Samhitā 2/16) and chanting mantras such as Gāyatri mantra, Vishnusahastranām remembering the seven holy rivers of Bhārat:

*Gange cha Yamune chaiva Godāvari Saraswati
Narmade Sindhu Kāveri jales-min sannidhim kuru*

– O Varuna! Please reside in the waters of the following rivers: Gangā, Yamunā, Godāvari, Saraswati, Narmadā, Sindhu and Kāveri.

The Nārad Pancharatram enjoins:

snānkāle Haritirtham Gangādikam vichintayet

– Sankarshan Samhitā, Āchārrātre 1/57

– while bathing remember Bhagwān's sacred tirths, Gangā, etc.

BAPS followers also remember Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, His 500 paramhansas and the guru *paramparā*, who bathed and thus sanctified the rivers: Ghelā in Gadhadā, Und in Bhadra and Gondali in Gondal. It is also a tradition to chant the *Janmangal Nāmāvali* while bathing (see Ch.20).

5. Why is it important to wear a dhoti during pujā? (for males)

To BAPS followers, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj advocates wearing a *dhotiyu* and a *gātariyu* (unstitched upper garment) during one's *nitya pujā* in the morning. This helps one feel *sāttvic*, in a spiritual frame of mind and 'dignified' to be presentable before Bhagwān and the Guru *paramparā*, who grace our *pujā*. Just as indecent clothing styles induce *rājasic* and *tāmasic* effects in the body and mind, the *dhotiyu* induces spiritually favourable thoughts in the mind. Such *sāttvic* clothing is a fundamental requirement to focus the mind during *pujā* and *sāadhanā* in general. Young Hindus should enthusiastically and with pride, learn how to wear this traditional garment, which was worn even by Bhagwān Shri

The traditional Indian dhoti

Since ancient times, the dhoti (Hindi – *Guj. dhotiyu*) has been the traditional garment worn by males on the lower part of the body. It is an unstitched, one-piece of cotton cloth about 4x1.2 metres. Being so loose and airy, it is the perfect apparel to suit the hot Indian climate.

As people began to adopt Western modes of dress, such as trousers and jeans, the dhoti declined. It continued being worn only by *sadhus*, *brahmin* pundits and rural folk.

Dhoti in pujā rituals

Brahmin pundits usually wear dhotis of yellow silk, known as *pitambar*; during religious rituals. For householders taking part in a *yagna/havan*, tradition requires a dhoti to be worn. It is considered *sāttvic* and is comfortable enough to allow sitting cross-legged for a long period. Tight-fitting garments restrict circulation and so are unsuitable for *pujā*.



wearing a dhotiyu in nitya pujā

Rāma and Shri Krishna Bhagwān. Hence it is the world's oldest surviving style of clothing for males, just as the *sāri* is for females.

6. Why is it preferable to use *divās* rather than candles during *pujā* rituals?



darshan of Ganeshji by light
from a divo of ghee

The Āgam texts prescribe *divā* (Hindi – *diyā*) which are lighted cotton wicks soaked in cow's ghee (or oil). They do not cite candles, which are made of wax. Furthermore, cow's ghee made from the milk of a red cow (*kapilā*) is considered more *sāttvic* than cows of other species. Ghee made from buffalo milk is not suitable for *pujā* rituals. Pure oil from seeds is allowable except for seeds of trees (Agama Kosha 1992 VII: 131).

The *divās* kept burning constantly (*akhand deep*) in some mandirs are cotton wicks soaked in ghee or oil in stylised containers made of metal, wood or clay. In the absence of the above three, a coconut shell is acceptable.

During *ārti*, the most appropriate number of *divās* is nine, five are the next best, with a minimum of one:

navadipayutam shreshtham panchamam tu madhyamam
kanyāsam tvekadipena yutam pātrakramam bhavet

7. What is the first prayer after awakening?

One of Sanātan Dharma's lofty belief is to regard the earth (*pruthvi*) as *mātā* (mother). Therefore stepping on the floor means stepping on her. Therefore one should utter the following shloka beseeching forgiveness:

Samudravasane devi parvatastanamandite
Vishnupatni namastubhyam pādsparcham kshamasva me.

– O Pruthvimātā, consort of Vishnu, who has adorned the oceans and mountains as garments! Kindly forgive me for stepping on you.

8. Is there a prescribed manner of offering flowers to a deity?

The Āgam texts classify flowers into five types: *sāttvic* (white-coloured), *rājasic* (red) and *tāmasic* (dark-coloured),





rajas-sāttvic (yellow) and *tamas-rajās* (blue-black) (Ishanshivagurudevapaddhati, Sāmānya pāda, Purva 8, 62-63). The texts enjoin that except for the blue lily, all *tāmasic* flowers are to be avoided.

Flowers totally devoid of fragrance or those with unpleasant fragrances should be avoided. Only those which have mild and pleasant fragrances are fit to be used in puja rituals. Flowers which have dropped on the ground on their own should be avoided, as should damaged or old flowers:

*Karānitam patānitam svayameva nipatitam
airandasya dale nitam hanti punyam purātanam.*

— Suprābheda Āgama

9. How should one place or face flowers and leaves in front of the deities?

yathotpannam tathārpanam

— Truchabhāskar

They should be offered just as they grow naturally.

patram vā yadi vā pushpam falam neshtamdhomukham

— Truchabhāskar

— leaves, flowers or fruits should not be offered facing downwards.

However for durvā and bili leaves, the shāstras enjoin:

durvā svābhimukhāgrā syurbilvapatramadhomukham

— Truchabhāskar

— durvā should be placed sideways and bili leaves facing downwards (on the Shivaling).

While offering flowers, one should use the middle and third fingers and thumb of the right hand:

madhyamānāmikāngushthaihi pushpam sangruhyam pujayet

— Chintāmani

To remove flowers off the deity (at night):

angushthatarjanibhyām tu nirmālyamapanodayet

— Kalika Purāna

— the thumb and forefinger should be used.



The prescribed manner of offering flowers, fruits or leaves is that they should face upwards towards the deity, rather than downwards or away from the deity.

— Āgama-Kosha 1992 VII: 127

Sanskrit names for fingers & thumb
tarjani/jyeshthikā – forefinger
madhyamā – middle
anāmikā – third
kanishtikā – little
angushthā – thumb

10. Rituals, flowers and leaves offerable to deities:

Deity	offerable	forbidden
Vishnu	<p><i>stuti</i> – prayer (Mantramahodadhi 17/116-117)</p> <p>red & blue (<i>neel</i>) lotus, jāti, chameli, kund, champo, karen, juhi, pātalā, borsali, apārājita, tagar (Viramitrodaya Pujaprakash)</p> <p>white, yellow coloured & fragrant flowers (Vishnudharmottar Purāna)</p> <p>tulsi leaves (Padma Purāna)</p>	<p>ānkado, dhaturu, shirish, languli, vad, umbaro, āmado, home grown karen, baporiyā (Vishnu Rahasya, Vishnudharmottar)</p> <p>mālati, mogaro, mallikā, arduso ānkado, karen, dhaturu (Padma Purāna, Uttar 92/25-27)</p>
Shiva	<p>abhishek (Mantramahodadhi 17/116-117)</p> <p>karen, dhaturu, lotus, bandhukā, chameli, champo, mogaro, tagar, kesar, mandār, bili leaves (Viramitrodaya Pujaprakash)</p> <p><i>Note: The Tattvasāgar Samhitā cites that all flowers offered to Vishnu may also be offered to Shiva.</i></p>	<p>ketki, borsali, kund, kesar, kutaj, nāgkesar, (Nārad Purāna, Purvakhand 67/61-62,69)</p> <p>juhi, kadamb (Viramitrodaya Pujaprakash)</p> <p>palāsh, kund, shirish, jui, mālati, kevado (Padma Purāna, Uttarkhand 92/25-27)</p>
Ganpati	<p><i>tarpan</i> (Mantramahodadhi 17/116-117)</p> <p>lādus (Acharendu)</p> <p>white & green <i>durvā</i> (Ganesh Purāna)</p> <p>all non-forbidden flowers (Acharbhushan)</p>	<p>tulsi (Nārad Purāna, Purvakhand 67/61-62,69)</p>
Devi	<p>lotus, kevado, karnikār, kadamb, bili leaves (Acharendu p.159)</p> <p>red & fragrant flowers (Parijat)</p>	<p>aak & mandār (Shatatap)</p>
Surya	<p>namaskār (Mantramahodadhi 17/116-117)</p> <p>mogaro, mālati, rose, karen, jāvantri, karnikār, champo, kund, lotus, borsali, palāsh, <i>durvā</i> grass and leaves of: bili, tulsi, tamāl, lotus, shami (Viramitrodaya Pujāprakāsh p.257)</p>	<p>dhaturu, apārājita, āmado (Viramitrodaya Pujaprakash)</p> <p>tagar, bijoru (Nārad Purāna, Purvakhand 67/61-62,69)</p>
Hanumānji	<p>sindur & oil, butter in south Indian temples, ākado</p>	<p>white coloured flowers</p>



Ākado



Bakul (borsali)



Chameli (jāti, mālati)



Champo



Dhaturo



Juhi



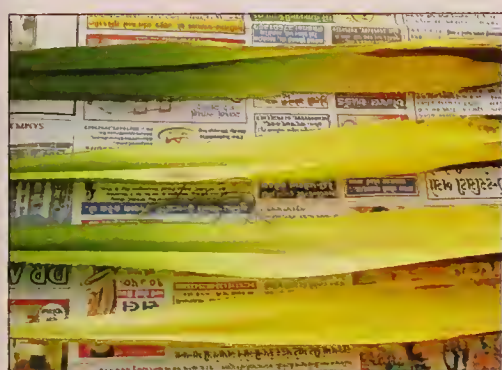
Kadamb



red Karen (karavir)



Palāsh (kesudo)



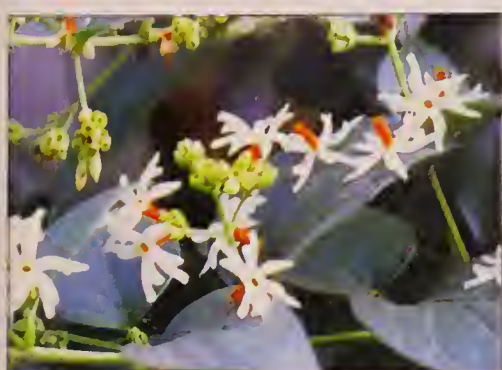
Kevdo (ketaki)



Lānguli



Mogaro (kund)



Pārijāt



Rasālā (mango)



Sevanti (guldāvadi)



Bhagwān Swāminārāyan preferred the red rose. However, there is also a reference of liking mogaro, in one of Premānand Swami's bhajans: 'Mogarānā ful sakhi... Shrijine pyārā bahu mogarānā ful...'



lotus



Lakshmi on lotus – kamal āsana
(Devi of wealth)



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj's morning puja with rose offerings.

11. Why is the lotus sacred?

There are many references in the shāstras which indicate the sanctity of the lotus (*Nelumbium speciosum*).

- It emerged from the navel of Vishnu with Brahmā seated on it. The latter then created the universe. The lotus is therefore considered as Brahmā's seat (āsana).
- The Vishnurahasya avers that Vishnu is very fond of the lotus. By offering him one lotus, the sins of ten million (crore) years are destroyed. If anybody, in any manner, offers a lotus to Vishnu, his destiny in Vishnu's abode is certain (Vishnudharmottar Purāna).
- It is the āsana of Lakshmi and Saraswati.
- Lakshmi-Nārāyan also reside in the lotus.
- Each of Yog's seven *chakras* (discs) to awaken kundalini, has a lotus with a specific number of petals:

Chakra	No. of petals in lotus	Presiding Deity
Mulādhār	four	Ganapati
Swāthisthān	six	Brahmā
Manipurak	ten	Vishnu
Anāhat	twelve	Shiva
Vishuddh	sixteen	Jivātmā
Āgnāchakra	two	Guru
Brahmarandhra	thousand	Paramātmā

(Source: Yogashikhopaniṣad 1/168-175).

- There is a lofty philosophical significance derived from the lotus's existence. It grows in muddy and stagnant water, rather than fresh water streams and

ivers. Despite the dirty aquatic habitat, it grows into a beautiful flower and colour. Moreover it is non-wettable. From this property, the phrase *jal-kamalvat* is derived. This means that just as a lotus remains ‘unwetted’ (untainted) by water (*jal*), a person should endeavour to live in samsāra detachedly (*nirlep*); without being bound by it.

- There are other symbolic imports of the lotus when associated with various deities.

Deity	Symbolic import of lotus
Vishnu’s navel	earth
Vishnu’s hand	water
Lakshmi & Pruthvidevi	wealth
Pārvati’s hand	<i>vairāgya</i> (detachment)
Indra’s hand	wealth and property
Moon’s hand	joy
Kuber’s hand	bag of wealth
Lotus alone	world

(Source: *Hindu Murtividhān* by P.J. Shah, 1974: 330-331)

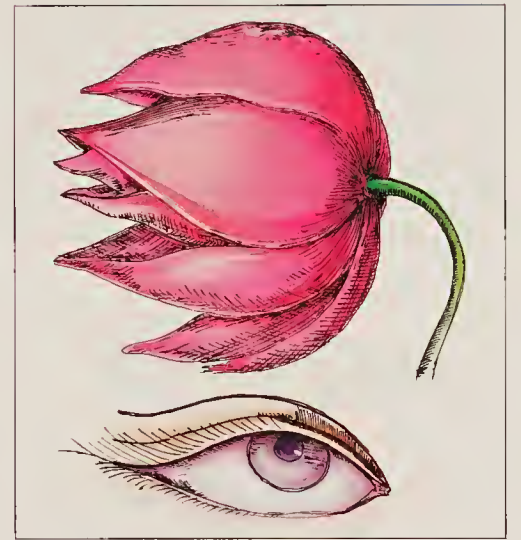
- Its attractive, elegant and aesthetic shape is used to describe the different parts of Paramātmā’s *murti*:

Part	Name
eyes	<i>netra-kamal</i>
mouth	<i>mukh-kamal</i>
heart	<i>hrudaya-kamal</i>
navel	<i>nābhi-kamal</i>
hands	<i>kar/hasta-kamal</i>
feet	<i>charan-kamal</i>

- Durlabhraj’s *Sāmudric Tilak* (1/32), cites that certain sacred symbols occur on the soles of rare souls. The Bhāgvatam (30/10/24) describes the occurrence of a flag, lotus, *vajra* (thunderbolt), goad, barley grain and others, on Shri Krishna’s soles. These were seen by the Gopis on his footprints, when he vanished in thin air after the divine *Mahā Rās*. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s lotus-feet had 16 sacred *chinhas*, which his paramhansas versified in their poetry (see details Ch.36). Of these, the lotus was located on his right sole. Followers and non-followers were also able to have the darshan of these signs during his physical presence on earth.



Saraswati on lotus
(Devi of knowledge)



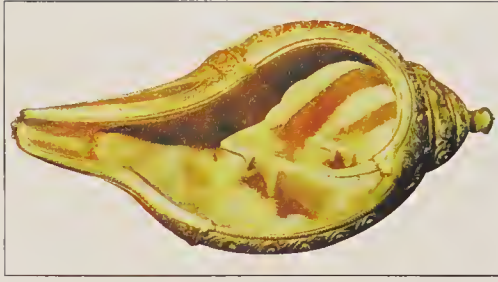
Netra kamal

sketch depicting the similarity of the lotus’s shape with Bhagwān’s eyes.



lotuses in the flooring
of a Hindu mandir

108 golden lotuses are offered to Venkateshwar Bālāji in Tirumālā with Vedic chanting every Tuesday at 5.30 am. This ritual is known as *Ashtadala pada padmārādhana sevā*.



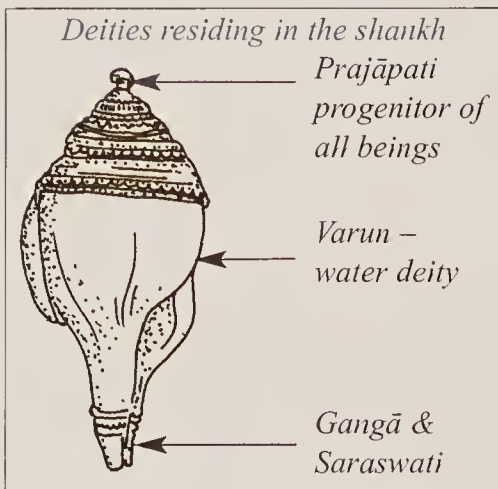
an extremely rare shankh, with two shankhs within



two shankhs & lotus engraved in the pāṭli of a dhajā dand



shankh on a brass stand



12. What is the importance of a shankh (conch shell)?

Shankh is the shell of the mollusk. In Sanskrit, *shamkh* signifies elimination of all misfortune – *shāmyati ashubham asmād iti*. Hence the *shankh* is considered auspicious in Sanātan Dharma. There are two types: right sided (*dakshinārvata*) and left sided (*vāmārvata*). The former is rare, considered more sacred and occurs in the river Tamraparni. It is believed that Lakshmiji resides in right-sided *shankhs*. Since both sprung forth from the ocean during Samudra Manthan, they are considered as brother and sister.

- One of the four sacred objects (*āyudha*) held by Shri Vishnu is the shankh, known as Pāñchjanya. The other three are *chakra* (disc), *gadā* (mace) and *padma* (lotus). Hence it is specially revered by Vaishnavs.
- Varuna, the deity of water is said to reside in the mid-section of the shankh; Prajāpati, the progenitor of all beings resides in its tail end and the twin river devis Gangā and Saraswati reside in its front portion.
- It is also believed that all *tirths* reside in the *shankh*. It embodies the attributes of purity, power, beauty and moksha.
- During *pujā* rituals, a special worship rite is performed known as *shankh sthāpan*. It is usually placed on a special three-legged brass stand, and never on the floor. It is offered *pujan* before and after *pujā* of the *murti*.

Uses

- Water filled in a shankh is considered auspicious. Hence it is used during *pujā* rituals and after *ārṭi*, representing *vāyu* – one of the Panch Mahābhuts (see p.44).
- It is used during *ārṭi*, by blowing through it. Its melodious sound vibrations are considered sacred and drive away evil. This also destroys pollutants in the air.
- Milk, especially that with saffron (*kesar*) in a shankh is used after grand *ārṭis*, as well as for bathing (*abhishek*) of *murtis* during *prāna pratishthā* (see Ch.2) and *pātotsav* (see Ch.9).
- It is used for worship rituals for all deities except Shiva and Surya (Sālagrāma-Kosha 1996 II: 117).
- It was used as a blow horn to announce the starting and ending of a battle, as well as during *rājyābhishek*

(coronation of a king), to announce victory, during *havan* and to welcome an eminent personage or sadhu.

- In the *Gītā* (1/19), the deafening roar of the Pandava shankhs terrified the Kauravs.
- *Shankhs* are prescribed for bathing (*abhishek*) *shaligrāms* with water (*shankhodak*) or milk. Tulsi leaves are then placed on the *shāligrām* and the *shankh*.
- The *shankh* must be located to the right of the *kalash* and to the left of the worshipper.
- *Shankhs* eligible for worship are obtained from the sea coast of Chennai, Jagannāth Puri, Rāmeshwaram and Sri Lanka.
- There also occurs an extremely rare, third type, known as Ganesh-shankh (Sālagrāma-Kosha 1996 II: 111). Its shape resembles Ganeshji's and it is vermilion-hued on the outer surface as well as the inner, and has a very short tail-end, unlike the usual *shankhs*.

Names of famous shankhs

Shri Krishna's – Pāñchjanya, Arjuna's – Devadatta, Bhim's – Paundra, Yudhishtir's – Anantvijay, Nakul's – Sughosh, Sahadev's – Manipushpak (*Gītā* 1/15,16)



Shri Vishnu with shankh



shankh carved in the flooring of a Hindu mandir in front of the garbha gruha

13. What are shāligrāms and why are they sacred?

Test of a Bānaling

*Tripanchavāram yasyaiva
tulāsābhyam na jāyate
tadā bānam samākhyātam tvidam
pāshānasambhabam*

— *Shilparatnākara* (11/260)

— such a ling of stone when weighed
will register a different weight on
every occasion, should be known as
a Bānaling.



Shāligrāms (*shāligrām*) are black stones in which fossil ammonites are embedded. They have been offered worship as aniconic images of Vishnu, since ancient times in mandirs and by people all over the land. They represent Vishnu, just as Shiva is worshipped in the ling form. The Shivaling may be a naturally occurring object such as the *bāna-ling* (white quartz) in the river Narmadā, carved in stone by man or *swayambhu* (self-formed), as are the 12 *Jyotirlingas* in India. However shāligrāms are always only naturally occurring stones found in the river Gandaki in the Himalayas, at a designated place, a village known as Shalagrama. The name is derived from the hut (*shāla*) of the sage *Shālankāyana*, who beheld Vishnu's form in a tree outside his hut.

The sacred stones are commonly found on the banks of the Kālīgandakī near Tukche, in the Nepal side of the Nepal-India border, between two mountains; Dhavalgiri and Annapurna.

Shāligrāms do not need any purificatory, invocatory rites or consecration (*prāna pratishthā*), as is necessary for *murits*. They naturally represent the *nitya-vibhuti* of Bhagwān Vishnu and are worshipped as and when they are located. Neither is there a need for a qualified pundit to perform its *pujā* rituals. Vishnu is symbolised by the *chakra* (discus) mark on the shāligrām.

Glory

A shāligrām with tulsi leaves and a shankh placed in one plate is considered most meritorious (*punyakāri*). The Brahmavaivart Purāna (Prakritikhand 19) enjoins that any religious ritual, gift, consecration and worship, should be performed preferably with a *shāligrām*. *Shrāddh* rites performed in front of a shāligrām ensures that the departed *jivātmā* reaches Vishnu's abode directly (Padma Purāna, Uttarkhand 127).

In ancient times, a witness in a court of law testified holding a *shāligrām*. If he gave false testimony, he would suffer immensely (Brahmavaivart Purāna, Prakritikhand 19). The *shāligrām* must be presented voluntarily by a guru, well-wisher or an ascetic, but never acquired by a financial transaction (Padma Purāna, Pātālkhand 11).

*Shāligrām ashilārūpi yātrā tishthati keshavah
tatra devāsura yakshā bhuvanāni chaturdashā*

– Vishnu resides in these stones, as do all other devas and the fourteen worlds (*loks*).

*Shāligrāmashilā yātrā tatra sannihito Harihi
tatsannidhau tyajetprānān Vishnu loke mahiyate*

– Purāna samgrah

– death in the presence of a *shāligrām* enables the *jivātmā* to go to Vishnu's abode, since Vishnu manifests in the stone.

In the Skand Purāna (*Kārtik mās mähātmya*), Shiva tells Skanda that all three worlds and he himself abide in a *shāligrām* stone. Its mere darshan is meritorious and much more so in worshipping it. Vishnu assures that whoever worships it once will surely attain moksha and also attain prosperity here, while alive (Padma Purāna, Uttarkhand, 127).

Origin in the Varāh Purāna

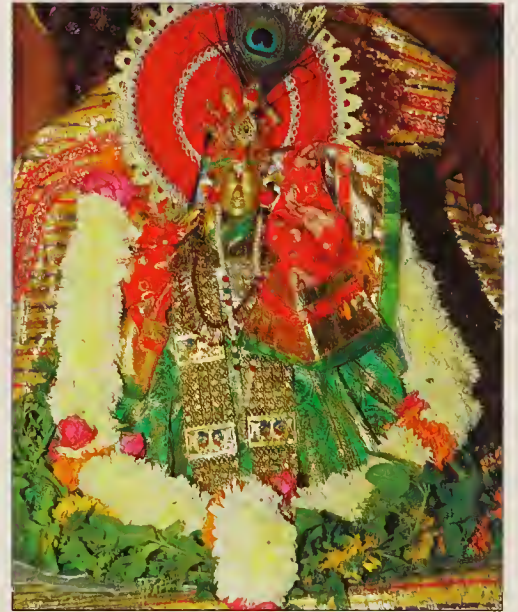
A river devi named Gandaki performed severe austerities in the Himalayas, living only on fallen leaves for some years and then only on air. She sought Vishnu's grace. When he manifested, she sang his glory and requested a boon to, 'enter my womb and become my child'. Vishnu consented; to reside in her 'womb' – the river's flow, in the form of *shāligrām* stones. Thus the stones became the offspring of the river and Gandaki also became sacred.

Vishnu granted that devotees who had the river's darshan, touched and drank its water and bathed in it, would be relieved of sins of speech, mind and body. The origin of the river Gandaki, and the presence of both Vishnu and Shiva in her, is cited in the Vishnu Purāna (9,6), Agni Purāna (152) and Bhāgavatam (8th skandh).

There are two other versions which centre around tulsi, in the Brahmavaivart Purāna (Prakritikhand 15) and Padma Purāna (*kriyā-yoga-sāra*). From these, tulsi has become associated with *shāligrām* pujā. This also forms the background of Tulsi Vivāh, marriage of tulsi plant to the *shāligrām* on Kārtik *sud* 12.



*shāligrām worshipped by
Gopālānand Swami, a stalwart
paramhansa and ashtāng yogi, of
Bhagwān Swāminārāyan
(Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir,
Junāgadh)*

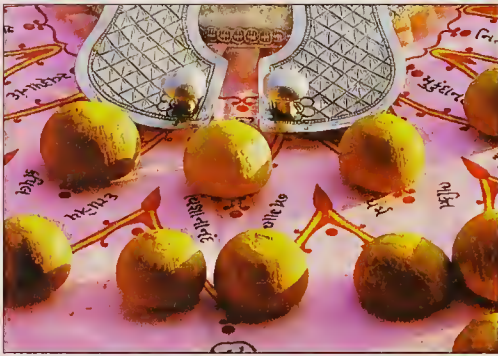


Tulsi Vivāh utsav





shāligrām tied around Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's neck (indicated).
(Source courtesy: F. Wala, Gadhadā)



Nirgun vigrah – Paramātmā & Deities invoked in betelnuts during Mahāpujā



Hanumānji smeared with sindur, Mahuva, Saurashtra
(Bhagwān Swāminārāyan visited this mandir as Neelkanth Varni in 1799)

Shāligrām worshipped by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan

In 1792, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan renounced home in Ayodhyā to embark on his seven-year *kalyān yātrā*. During this period he performed pujā of the shāligrām named 'Bāl Mukund', which he kept in a cloth bag tied around his neck. Whenever he partook water, fruit or food, he first offered it to Bāl Mukund. Only then did he avail of this *prasād*. At present this *shāligrām* is with the head of the Nar-Nārāyan Deva diocese in Amdavad.

14. Unlike the usual murtis of Bhagwān, why are Shivalings and Shāligrāms without arms or legs ?

There are four types of forms which symbolically represent Paramātmā.

(1) *Swayambhu* – the self-formed e.g. earth, river, fire, water etc.

(2) *Nirgun vigrah* – represents the formless (*nirākār*) and *nirgun* (without *māyic* attributes) form of Paramātmā. e.g. Shāligrām, Shivaling, Dwādash Jyotirlings and *sopāri* (betelnut).

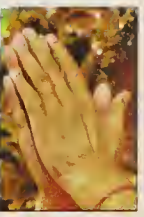
(3) *Sagun vigrah* – represents the *sākār* (with shape) form of Paramātmā. These include : *Chaturbhuj* (four-armed) Vishnu and *Panchmukhi* (five-faced) Shiva.

(4) *Avatār vigrah* – represents those who incarnated on earth in human form, such as: Shri Rāmachandra Bhagwān, Shri Krishna Bhagwān, Nrusinhji (half-man, half-lion) and Bhagwān Swāminārāyan.

Since Shivaling and Shāligrām represent the *nirākār* form of Paramātmā, the question of form does not arise. It is also because of this that they are not termed *murti*, but *ling* or *gram*. *Shāla* means group of devas. *Grām* means the place where they reside. Shāligrām is worshipped by those Vaishnavs who believe in the *nirākār* form of Vishnu.

15. Why is sindur and oil offered to Hanumānji?

Once Hanumānji wished to accompany Shri Rāma to Swarg. However Bhagwān declined, saying that nobody could accompany him there. 'But Sitāji does so,' replied Hanumānji. Perplexed for a moment by this reply from his most loyal *sevak*, Shri Rāma replied, 'O beloved Hanumān, Sitā mātā can accompany me anywhere because of the power latent in the sindur *rekhā* (line) on her head.'



Hanumānji dashed off eagerly in search of *sindur*. He hurled it over his whole body. However as he jumped gleefully, all the sindur powder fell off, since it is non-sticky. Though downhearted, he then hit upon a brilliant idea. He poured oil on his body. Then he smeared sindur all over. It stuck! He then rushed to find his Lord, eager to accompany him to Swarg. If a pinch of sindur on Sitāji's head can be so powerful, he was dowsed with it, head to toe!

At first, Shri Rāma could not recognise the glistening orange figure. When Hanumānji explained, Bhagwān's eyes filled with tears. He embraced Hanumānji. The oil and sindur stuck on Shri Rāma too. Since that day, it has become a traditional ritual to offer oil and sindur to Hanumānji as a form of *pujan*, and people know in their hearts that this will ultimately touch Bhagwān Shri Rāma when he embraces Hanumānji!

Another story cites that Sitāji was once dabbing sindur in her hair. Hanumānji asked her for the reason. She replied, 'Because Shri Rāma likes it'. This inspired Hanumānji to do likewise, to please Shri Rāma. He then set off as described above.



In the Padmanābh Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivendram), Kerala, there is a murti of Sree Hanumān Swamy, near the main Belikkal (murti), on which butter is smeared. Even on hot days, this butter never melts, nor turns rancid and is never eaten by insects. A fire in 1934 came close to Hanumānji, without melting the butter.

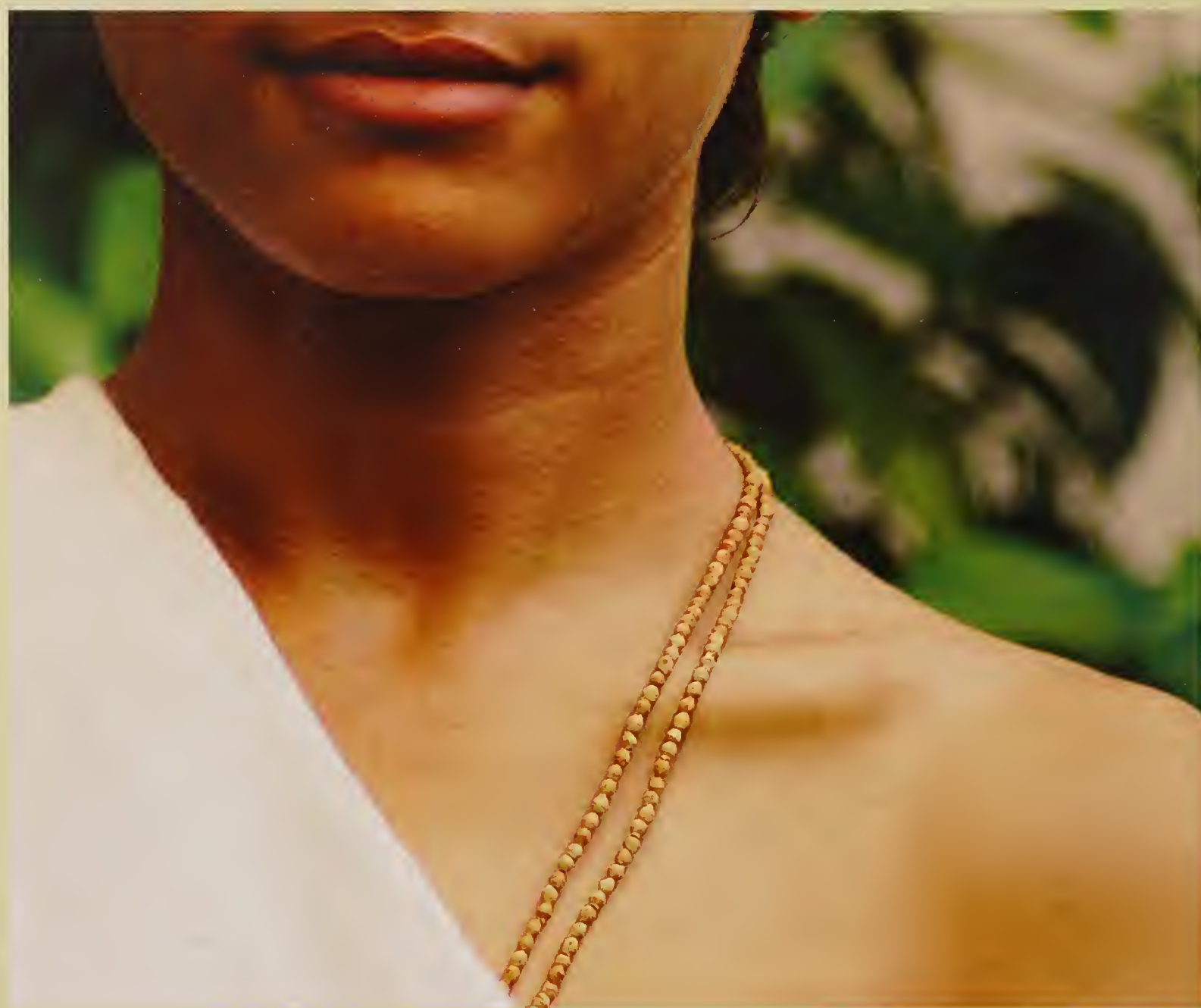
— Gouri Lakshmi Bayi (2000:367)

Legacy in south India

In many temples in south India, instead of sindur and oil, a tradition prevails of smearing butter. There is an interesting underlying reason. When Hanumānji returned to mainland Bhārat after setting fire to Rāvana's Lankā, his tail suffered burns. Devotees then applied butter to soothe the burning. This devotional legacy continues to this day.



Sri Anjeneya (Hanumānji decorated with sandalwood paste, Suchindram, Tamil Nadu)



29. Kanthi (Beads worn around neck)

- Kanthi
- Types of wood for kanthi
- Kanthi of two strings in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya
- Vartmān ritual
- Receiving vartmān. Vows observed after vartmān
- Wearing a kanthi in the absence of the Param Ekāntik Satpurush
- Kanthi in other sampradāyas

कंठी



Wearing a kanthi is a symbol of sharanāgati to Bhagwān.

The shāstras do not consider wearing a black thread as a symbol of sharanāgati to Bhagwān.

Kanthi

Kantha means neck. The two strings of miniature wooden beads that a *bhakta* wears round his neck is a *kanthi*. *Kanthi* is a symbol of surrenderance – *sharanāgati* to Bhagwān. The *kanthi* induces awareness in a *bhakta*, that he has surrendered himself to Bhagwān. Bhagwān is now his *Swami* – Master.

Even the strongest and most powerful man is helpless against the forces of nature. He is even weaker than a blade of grass. Those who cannot easily accept this fact have to bow to it in the end, when they observe natural forces at work in volcanoes, earthquakes, typhoons, tornadoes, tsunamis and drought. There is only one force of power underlying these occurrences – Bhagwān. There is also peace of mind in learning to accept this profound truth and therein man is better able to progress materially and spiritually. In fact, the acme of freedom is to accept Bhagwān's *sharanāgati* and be subservient to Him. Accepting His *sharanāgati* crushes man's dependency on his technological prowess and scientific ingenuity. *Bhaktas* heartily accept His *sharanāgati*, represented symbolically by wearing a *kanthi*.

Types of wood for *kanthi*

Hindus regard the tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) plant as a symbol of yagna, of surrenderance. Whenever a *bhakta* donates something, he constantly bears the following sentiment in mind: *idam na mama* – 'this (item being donated) is not mine. It is Bhagwān's.' So the *bhakta* also places a few tulsi leaves with the item being donated. When



kanthi of black & gold plated beads

opp page: Shri Swāminārāyan Sampradāya's two-stringed kanthi tied with a knot (behind the neck)



BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan sampradāya's 2-stringed kanthis, tied with a knot at the top.

The Bhārdhwāj Samhitā (Ch.2) of the Panchrātra shāstras cites three types of dikshā: sāmānya, vishesh and mahādikshā. The vartmān ritual of the Swāminārāyan sampradāya is equivalent to the sāmānya dikshā. Vishesh dikshā is that given to a grūhasth who wishes to become a sadhu. This is known as Bhāgyati dikshā in the sampradāya (see also p.421, Swāminārāyan sadhu tradition)

prasād is offered to Bhagwān, tulsi leaves are also placed on the food. With precisely the same feelings, one offer's his body to Bhagwān, in surrenderance: 'O Prabhu! This body is Yours, not mine.' But instead of offering tulsi leaves with it, devotees wear a *kanthi* of tulsi wood round the neck. Since tulsi wood is rare, *kanthis* of other woods are also worn.

Kanthis of two strings in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

In Vachanāmṛt Vartāl 5, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan advocates service to Bhagwān along with His ideal *bhakta*. So the two strings represent Bhagwān and His *bhakta*.

In the Arthadeepikā commentary of the Shikshāpatṛi, Swami Shatānand cites the same principle:

Nanu mālā dhārane ko hetuhu?

Iti chet shri Rādhākṛishnasyayugalaswarūpopāsaka-twasuchanārtham iti awagamyatām.

– what is the reason for the two strings of the *kanthi*? It is to signify the worship of Rādhā and Krishna – *bhakta* and Bhagwān; Akshar and Purushottam.

Vartmān ritual

The new-born or newcomer is initiated into the satsang by a simple ritual known as *vartmān*. Outside the sampradāya, people also call this ritual *dikshā* (see note in margin). Sanctified water is held in the right palm. A mantra is then spoken by the initiator, usually a sadhu. This is then repeated by the newcomer. The water is then poured away and the *kanthi* is adorned. The mantra spoken is:

*Kāl māyā pāp karma yamadut bhayādaham,
Swāminārāyanam sharanam prapannosmi sa pātu mām.*

– I have come at the lotus feet of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and may He deliver me from the fear of time, māyā, sin, karma and evil. May He protect me.

By accepting *sharanāgati* of Bhagwān, the *bhakta* is freed from sins of all previous births and helps him to become fearless. He has no need to fear superstitious elements, ghosts, evil spirits and omens. He is freed of karmas of the past. He places his destiny in Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's hands, vowing to live according to His commands.

The principle underlying *vartmān* involves purification of the *jiva* before accepting the *sharanāgati* of Bhagwān. The



sanctified water cleanses by removing sins. Water itself has the attribute of spiritual cleansing. To be purified in mind, speech and action, water is held in the right palm. There is also another reason for holding water in the hand. As we saw earlier:

Apsu vai Varunaha

– Taittiriya Upanishad 15/5/6

– the deity of water is Varuna.

Whenever a vow is to be taken, it is done with *Varunadeva* as a witness by keeping water (symbolic form of Varuna) in the hand. This is known as *sankalp*.

Anrute khalu vai kriyāmane Varuno gruhnāti.

– Taittiriya Upanishad 1/7/2/6

– if the vow is broken Varuna may fine a penalty.

Receiving vartmān

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan enjoins:

*Samprāpya dikshāmeha bhaktidharmayuktād gurorbhāgavatim naraha prāk,
Archām tataha prāpya taduktarityā bhaktim vidadhyādapatindra Vishnoho.*

– Satsangijivanam 2/51/9

– in this world, after accepting *vartmān* from the beholder of Dharma and Bhakti – the Param Ekāntik Sadhu, one receives the divine *murti* of Bhagwān from this guru. By ridding laziness one offers bhakti to Bhagwān as instructed by that guru.

In this way by the injunction of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, it is ideal to accept *vartmān* and wear a *kanthi* from the *Gunātīt* sadhu. The reason for this is that in dire circumstances or when the *bhakta* is on the verge of falling from the path of Bhagwān, only such a sadhu is able to uplift him by giving guidance and strength. Even the Āchārya receives *vartmān* from such a sadhu. For example, Āchārya Shri Vihārīlālji Mahārāj of Vartāl was given *vartmān* and *kanthi* when just an infant by Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami, the first spiritual successor of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan.

After wearing the *kanthi*, the codes of conduct to be strictly observed by the new *bhakta* are: eschew alcohol, meat, thieving, adultery and to observe rules pertaining to one's station in life. He also imbibes the way of living prescribed in the *Shikshāpatri*.



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj giving
vartmān to newcomers

Wearing a kanthi in the absence of the Param Ekāntik Satpurush

By the injunction of the Satpurush, other sadhus can also give *vartmān* and invest the newcomer with a *kanthi*. In this way, the *kanthi* is said to be equally invested by the Satpurush, because he is the guru of all those sadhus. They just act as mediators. Similarly, senior women devotees are appointed to give *vartmān* to new female devotees.

Kanthi in other sampradāyas

Followers of Vallabhacharya's Pushti sampradāya wear a two-stranded *kanthi* made of tulsi twigs (see margin), after they receive *Brahmasambandh* from their *āchārya*. This is equivalent to the *vartmān* ritual.

Followers of the Gaudiya sampradāya of Bengal wear a tulsi kanthi, which is wound three times around the neck.

Followers of the Vir Shaiva sampradāya in south India, wear a *kanthi* with a small Shivaling.

Followers of Vithobā, in Pandharpur, Maharashtra (Vārkhari sampradāya) wear a one-stringed tulsi *kanthi* with a knot. The three-ribbed sumeru is of special importance to the followers.



Gaudiya sampradāya's kanthi of tulsi of 3 sizes



tulsi kanthi of the Vārkhari sampradāya (29 cm. long)



ISKCON sampradāya's kanthis of tulsi



*sadhus performing a public (samuh) vartmān ritual for children –
who are then blessed by Pramukh Swami Mahārāj,
BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Amdavad*

सोल संस्कार



30. Sixteen Samskāras

[Rites of passage (Sacraments)]



सोलह संस्कार

- Meaning of samskāra
- Purpose of samskāras
- Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and samskāras
- Pre-natal samskāras
- Childhood samskāras
- Educational samskāras
- Vivāh samskāras

Eight types of marriages

Hindu marriage sentiments

Concept of equality

Concept of *ātmā* in marital discord

Vivāh samskāras

- Mrityu samskāras

In natural calamities

Antyeshti samskāras of ascetics

Although the numbering and number of samskāras prescribed by various *Gruhyasutras* vary, the sixteen below are a consensus among scholars*.

**Bhāratiya Prāchīn Samskruti*
by A.V. Patel (1962: 426-442).

- Pre-natal samskāras
 1. *Garbhādhān* (conception)
 2. *Pumsavan* (engendering a male issue)
 3. *Simantonayan* (hair-parting)
- Childhood samskāras
 4. *Jātakarma* (birth rituals)
 5. *Nāmkaran* (name-giving)
 6. *Nishkraman* (first outing)
 7. *Annaprāshan* (first feeding)
 8. *Chudākarma* (chaul) (shaving of head)
 9. *Karnavedh* (piercing the earlobes)
- Educational samskāras
 10. *Vidyārambh* (learning the alphabet)
 11. *Upanayan* (*yagnopavit*) (sacred thread initiation)
 12. *Vedārambh* (beginning Vedic study)
 13. *Keshānt* (*godān*) (shaving the beard)
 14. *Samāvartan* (end of studentship)
 15. *Vivāh* (marriage)
 16. *Antyeshti* (death rites)

Meaning of samskāra

Since eternity man has strived to upgrade his life. This awareness, unique only to mankind, has led him to think deeper about his physical, mental and spiritual well being. Towards this end, the seers prescribed a set of observances known as samskāras. (Though pronounced sanskars in gujarati, the original sanskrit form samskāras will be used).

The nearest English word for samskāra is sacrament. The Oxford English Dictionary defines sacrament as ‘a religious ceremony or act regarded as an outward and visible sign of inward or spiritual grace.’ In classical Sanskrit literature texts, such as Raghuvamsh, Kumarsambhav, Abhijnan-Shakuntal, Hitopadesh and Manu Smriti, samskāra is used to mean: education, cultivation, training, refinement, perfection, grammatical purity, polishing, embellishment, decoration, a purificatory rite, a sacred rite, consecration, sanctification, effect of past actions (*karmas*) and merit of *karmas*.

A general definition of samskāra, encompassing nearly all of the above is ‘to improve upon something while removing its undesirable taints by performing rites ordained by the shāstras.’

Purpose of samskāras

The purpose of samskāras are two-fold:

(a) Cultural. The variety of rites and rituals related to the samskāras help in upgrading a person. In the Parāshar Smriti (8/19) it is said, “Just as a picture is painted with various colours, so the character of a person is formed by undergoing various samskāras.” Thus, the Hindu sages realised the need of consciously guiding and moulding the character of individuals, instead of letting them grow in a haphazard manner.

(b) Spiritual. According to the seers, samskāras impart an *ādhyātmic* – spiritual – sanctity to life. Impurities associated with the material body are eradicated by performing samskāras. The whole body is consecrated and made a fit dwelling place for the *ātmā*. According to the Atri Smriti (141-142) a man is born a *shudra*; by performing the *upanayana* samskāra he becomes a *dvijā* (twice born); by acquiring the Vedic lore he becomes a *vipra* (an inspired poet); and by realising brahman he becomes a brahmin. The samskāras are a form of spiritual endeavour (*sādhana*) – an external discipline for internal spiritual edification. Thus, the

*Ātmasharirā-nyatāranishtho
vihitakriyājanyo-tishayavisheshah
samskāraha*

– samskāra is to better in some way
either the *ātmā* or body through
some rite.

16 samskāras during *prāna
pratishthā*

The 16 samskāras are also
performed in the *prāna pratishthā*
ritual of murtis consecrated in a new
mandir of the BAPS Shri
Swāminārāyan sampradāya.



entire life of a Hindu is one grand sacrament. The Isha Upanishad reveals that the final goal of samskāras, by observing rites and rituals is, 'to transcend the bondage of samsāra and cross the ocean of death.' To this we can add that after transcending the cycle of births and deaths, the *ātmā* attains Paramātmā – Bhagwān Purushottam. Therefore in essence the sixteen samskāras commence with and use the physical, outer body to transform the *ātmā* within.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and samskāras

In the Vachanāmṛut, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan defines the goal of a *jiva* as realising Ekāntik Dharma, which comprises four factors: dharma, *jnān*, *vairāgya* and bhakti. Defining each of these factors in the Shikshāpatṛi, He prescribes practical tenets to be observed by followers to realise Ekāntik Dharma. These tenets are also a form of samskāras, since they 'samskarise' the individual. They include those which maintain body purity, such as: bathing daily, purity of diet by eschewing meat and intoxicants, and wearing decent clothing. Tenets which 'samskarise' the mind and *jiva* include: fasting on auspicious days, *dān*, *tirth yātrā*, *pujā*, avoiding – evil company, theft, suicide, homicide, adultery and gambling, observing religious *utsavs* and *prāyashchitta* – atonement, performing *yagnas*, visiting mandirs, study of *shāstras* and singing bhajans extolling Paramātmā's glory. In essence, the latter are forms of *Navdhā bhakti*.

However, the highest samskāra and Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's foremost injunction (Shikshāpatṛi 116), enjoins an individual to identify his *ātmā* – above the three bodies – with Aksharbrahman and offer bhakti to Bhagwān Purushottam. Since Swāminārāyan Darshan believes the physical body composed of the *panch bhuts* as real, and not *mithyā* – illusory, as believed by some schools of philosophy, a person endeavours to use this as an instrument, to 'samskarise' himself to attain a divine body (*Bhāgvatī tanu*). When this is achieved, it is known as realising Ekāntik Dharma. This is the final samskāra and the ultimate fruit too, according to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan.

Pre-natal samskāras

1. *Garbhādhān* (conception)

Garbha means womb. *Ādhān* means placing. In this the man places his seed in a woman. The Gruhyasutras and Smṛutis advocate special conditions and observances for this,

Sixteen Samskāras

'Today we have forgotten the Sixteen Samskāras. Those who are bhaktas, of religious inclination, who have faith in Paramātmā and the shāstras understand these samskāras. One who is samskarised is known as Ārya. When samskāras of dharma are imbibed by man, only then does he truly become man. If he lives an existence similar to an animal, he is not called man.'

In Bhārat, our samskāras originated in the Vedas; given to us by rishis, avatārs and sadhus. Yet today, we are losing them, swayed by Western influence and etiquette. We have become modern but not civilized. People worry about looking good, yet do not care to bathe daily nor use water for the morning ablutions... Alcohol, addictions, meat, partying... these are not our samskāras. We may have learnt to have meals on the (dinner) table, yet we have forgotten our ādhyātmic samskāras. We should not forget our eternal, original values. We should imbibe and perpetuate them.'

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan was invested with childhood samskāras. Though He is the Supreme Reality, He set an example for us. Paramātmā and the sadhus imbue us samskāras for eternal happiness.'

– Pramukh Swami Mahārāj
10th February 2001, Amdavad.

to ensure healthy and intelligent progeny. Procreation of children was regarded as necessary for paying off debts to the forefathers. The shāstras also cite another important reason for having progeny. When the student ends his Vedic studies, he requests permission to leave from his teacher (see *Samāvartan*). The teacher then blesses him with some sage advice, which he should imbibe for life. One of the commands is:

Prajātantun mā vyavachchhetseehi...

– Taittiriya Upanishad, Shikshāvalli, Anuvak 11.11

– do not terminate one's lineage – let it continue (by having children).

2. *Pumsavan* (engendering a male issue)

Pumsavan and *Simantonnayan* (the third samskāra) are only performed during the woman's first issue. *Pumsavan* is performed in the third or fourth month of pregnancy when the moon is in a male constellation, particularly the *Tishya-nakshatra*. This symbolises a male child. Therefore the term *pumsavan* means 'giving to a male child' (Atharva Veda 6/11/1). Sushrut, the rishi – surgeon of Ayurveda, prescribes in his *Sushrut Samhitā* (Shārīrsthān 2/19): 'Having pounded milk with any of these herbs – *sulakshmana*, *batasurga*, *sahadevi* and *vishvadeva* – one should instil three or four drops of juice in the right nostril of the pregnant woman. She should not spit out the juice.'

3. *Simantonnayan*

In Gujarati, this is known as *Kholo bharavo*. In this, the husband parts the wife's hair. The religious significance of this samskāra is to bring prosperity to the mother and long life to the unborn child. It also wards off evil influence. The physiological significance is astonishingly poignant and advanced. Sushrut believed that the foetus's mind formed in the fifth month of pregnancy (*Sushrut Samhitā*, Shārīrsthān 3/14). Hence the mother is required to take the utmost care for delivering a healthy child. Stipulating the details, Sushrut enjoined the pregnant mother: not to talk or listen to talks which disturbed her, avoid talking in a raised voice, to maintain purity, perform peaceful actions, to promptly serve brahmins and gurus, avoid company of deformed and diseased people and these who advocate abortion, avoid exertion of all kinds, refrain from sleeping during the day and keeping awake at night, avoid hot and dry foods, bad smells,

Modern research findings

In his book *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child* (1981), the psychiatrist Dr. Thomas Verny presents evidence from many institutes in Europe and USA that links various forms of maternal anxiety during pregnancy to the possible psychological or physical damage of the foetus. From this, one can glean the wisdom of the advice given by Sushrut rishi to the husband and wife (see text).



anger, oil massage, tearful crying, fear, purgatives, crowds, copulation, phlebotomy (blood letting by slicing veins) and postponing natural excretions and avoid visiting a vacant house or cemetery, eat foods which appeal to oneself, spiced with herbs which keep the digestive fire boosted and sleep on a comfortable bed which is not too high nor too low (Sushrut Samhitā, Shārīrsthān 10/2).

Besides samskāras which affect the physical health of the foetus, ancient shāstras contain examples of learning samskāras imprinted on it. From the Mahābhārat we know that Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, learnt the secrets of battle strategy while in his mother, Subhadrā's womb. The child-devotee Prahlād of the Bhāgavatam, learnt about the glory of Nārāyan while in his mother, Kayādhu's womb. Just as a foetus can attain good spiritual samskāras from the external world, the opposite is also true. It can definitely be affected by certain undesirable practices of the mother. Today we know that smoking, alcohol, certain medications and drugs have a detrimental effect on the foetus. The Varāha Smṛuti prohibits eating meat during pregnancy. Therefore the Smṛutis enjoined the husband to take every possible care to preserve the physical, mental and spiritual health of his pregnant wife. The Kālavīdhān forbids him to go abroad or to war, build a new house and bathe in the sea. (These were potentially hazardous ventures of tension or 'point of no return' for the husband, leaving the wife a widow).

Simant ritual

On the designated day and *muhurt*, the pregnant mother first bathes at the nearby house of a relative or friend. She then arrives at her new (husband's) home. Here she does not step directly on the bare floor but on saris laid on the floor. A woman follows her and applies wet kumkum on her toes and feet. This imprints her feet marks (*kanku paglā*) on the saris. *Kanku paglā* signifies auspiciousness. As she walks ahead, one *sopāri* and one or 1.25 rupee coins are placed on each footprint.

She then sits on a wooden *bājoth* and performs Ganesh puja, in the midst of other invited women. Her brother offers her a *shrifal*, which she puts in a cane *supadu* (tray). The *supadu* contains items shown in margin.

auspicious dravyas for performing simant rite

- (1) 1.25 sher (625 g.) jaggery
- (2) 2.25 sher (2.5 kg) wheat grains
- (3) *durvā* stalks and other puja dravyas

and the following seven items:

- (1) 7 *sopāris* (areca nut)
- (2) 7 banyan berries
- (3) 7 *kamalkakdi*
- (4) 7 *kharek* (dried dates)
- (5) 7 raw *sitafal*
- (6) 7 balls of jute string
- (7) 7 copper coins (without holes)



Ganesh puja during simant rite



auspicious dravyas



five married women filling the lap (kholo) of the woman with simant

Her husband's sister (*nanand*) ties a *rākhadi* on her right wrist. This *rākhadi* is made of a piece of cloth which contains: a *chanothi* (type of dry berry), a small iron nail, *sindur* powder and oil and a pinch of earth picked from a cross-road. This *rākhadi* protects her from evil spirits and influence. She only unties this after child-birth, after she returns from her own home (*peer*). The *nanand* then also ties a gold berry (*bor*) on her wrist.

Next, her husband's younger brother lightly slaps her right check with his right palm dipped in wet kumkum. He then gives her some yogurt to eat. The sentiment underlying this is to foster affection between them.

Next, her brother, who has arrived to take her home, takes the *shrifal* from the *supadu* and gives it to her. She puts this in a plate to perform Ganesh puja.

After this, five married women who have given normal births (women with *akhand kukh*), each take turns in carefully pouring the contents of the *supadu* in her lap. She then pours this back into the *supadu*. After the fifth woman, she pours the contents of her lap in front of Ganeshji.

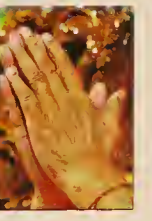
She then feeds *kansār prasād* to five baby boys and then humbly bows to them with the sentiments, 'Let Bhagwān bless me so I can bear five boys like you.' She then bows to all the elderly people present, usually her in-laws and parents, who bless her. She then arranges for food to be served to everybody on this auspicious occasion.

This unique ritual bestows samskāras to the foetus in her womb.

Childhood samskāras

4. Jātakarma (birth rituals)

These rituals are performed at the birth of a child. It is believed that the moon has a special effect on the newly born. In addition, the constellation of the planets – *nakshatras* – also determine the degree of auspiciousness. If birth occurs during an inauspicious arrangement, the *jātakarmas* are performed to ward off their detrimental effects on the child. The father would also request the *Brahmanishth Satpurush* for blessings.



In the Swāminārāyan sampradāya a *sutak* (period of impurity) of 30 days by the mother, 12 days by other family members and three days by relatives, is observed during which personal worship rituals such as *pujā*, *ārti* and *thāl* are suspended.

The *vartmān* ritual is also performed on the new-born. The male child is given *vartmān* and *kanthi* by sadhus or a senior male devotee in the nearest mandir or Satsang centre (see p.274). Similarly the female child is initiated by a senior female devotee.

5. Nāmakaran (name-giving)

A name is chosen from the one or more syllables ascribed to each *rāshi* (asterism). The *rāshi* is decided from the position of the moon at the time of birth.

In the Sanātān Dharma, a child is frequently named after an avatār, deity, rishi, tirth, inspiring personality from the shāstras or sacred river (for females), as a constant reminder of the lofty virtues associated with the name.

The Pāraskar Gruhyasutra advocates naming a child ten nights after birth.



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj performing the *vartmān* ritual

Dasharātre vyushte nāmakaranāmiti

The Manu Smṛuti (2/30) and Baudhāyan Gruhyasutra (2/1/23) also enjoin nāmakaran on 10th or 12th day after birth or an auspicious *tithi*, *muhurt* and *nakshatra* thereafter.

Formerly a name was based on the month of birth. This was the *māsnām*, usually derived from the name of an incarnation. A child was also named from the syllable represented by the nakshatra at birth. However nowadays, instead, a name is chosen from the syllables allocated to the *rāshi* (zodiac) in which the moon happens to be in at the time of birth. For this the *Panchāṅg* is consulted. This is known as the *nakshatranām*. These names always have meaningful sentiments. Generally in the Gujarati community, the *phui* – father's sister chooses the name.

Further, some give a loving nickname, known as *vyavahārṇām*, which lacks meaning e.g. Pintu.

Followers of the BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā approach Pramukh Swami Mahārāj or other senior sadhus to name their children (see table for details of naming):

On the 6th day after birth, known as chhathi, a piece of silk cloth is placed next to the baby at night. Kumkum is sprinkled on it, and a swastik or tilak is imprinted with the kumkum. Then a scribing pen and kumkum are left next to the cloth. It is believed that the Vidhata devi arrives at midnight to write the baby's future on the cloth. Imprinting tilak on the chhathi's cloth is a must and the future of the baby will be written brighter.

Rashis		Naming the new-born	
Sanskrit	English	Syllables	Example
Mesh	Aries	A, L, E	Arunā, Lalitā, Elā
Vrushabh	Taurus	B, V, U	Bala, Vasudeva, Urmilā
Mithun	Gemini	K, Chh, Gh, Ksh	Kirtan, Chhagan, Ghanshyām, Kshitij
Kark	Cancer	D (ड), H.	Dāhyālāl, Harikrishna
Sinha	Leo	M, T (ट),	Manjulā, Tārak
Kanyā	Virgo	P	Priyavadan
Tulā	Libra	R, T (ट),	Rushi, Tilak
Vrushchik	Scorpio	N, Y	Neelkanth, Yagnesh
Dhan	Sagittarius	Bh, Dh (ध), F	Bhāgvat, Dharmāng, Fālguni
Makar	Capricorn	Kh, J	Khumān, Jyoti
Kumbha	Aquarius	G, Sh (श), S	Gitā, Shāntilāl, Sushilā
Meen	Pisces	D(ड), Ch, Z	Darshan, Chandrikā, Zamkubā

The table above depicts the syllables each rāshi represents with one example name for each.



annaprāshan rite (choroon) in the Shri Krishna mandir, Guruvāyur, Kerala. Brahmin pundits offer thirtham (holy water), cooked rice, payasam, pappad & plantain to children

Nāmkaran is an important samskāra, since an auspicious meaning (*bhāvnā*) is attached to a name based on an avatār or personality from the shāstras. Hence this *bhāvnā* confers samskāra to the individual. For example, a person named Harikrishna will endeavour to imbibe the divine sentiments associated with that avatār. Girls named Ansuya, Sāvitri, Sitā will strive to imbibe virtues of the *Pativrata* – chaste woman.

6. Nishkraman (first outing)

He is allowed darshan of the sun and *chandra* (moon) and also taken. He to the mandir for darshan of Bhagwān or *kuldevatā*. In the fourth month he is taken out of the house for the first time, by the father or maternal uncle.

7. Annaprāshan (first feeding)

Feeding the child with solid food is the next important samskāra. For a son the Smruti's prescribe this in even months – the 6th, 8th, 10th or 12th month. For a daughter this is done in odd month – 5th, 7th or 9th months. The food offered is cooked rice with ghee. Some *sutras* advocate honey to be mixed with this.

An interesting rite also performed on this day is cited in Mārkaṇḍeya by Apararka (p.28). This involves placing various objects, weapons and tools required in various crafts on the floor. The child is allowed to crawl towards these. The object that he seizes gives an inkling of the profession that he is destined to follow. When Dharmadeva and Bhaktimātā placed a shāstra, a small sword and gold coin, Bāl Ghanshyām (Bhagwān Swāminārāyan) picked up the shāstra.

8. Chudākarma (chaul) (first shaving of head)

Chudā means ‘lock or tuft of hair’ kept on the head after the rest is shaved – the *shikhā*. Therefore *chudākarma* (*chudākaran*) is that rite in which a lock of hair is kept (for the first time after birth).

This samskāra involves shaving the head for the first time (of a son) in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 5th year, and when initiating him with the *janoi* (*yagnopavit*). According to the Ayurvedic surgeon Sushrut, the significance of this, together with nail cutting, is to give delight, lightness, prosperity, courage and happiness (Chikitsāsthān 24-72). Charak, the Ayurvedic physician also voiced a similar opinion. *Chaul* samskāra was also performed for girls but without chanting Vedic mantras (Āshvalāyan Gruhya Sutra I/17/18, Manu Smṛuti 2/66, Yājñavalkya Smṛuti I/13). In some social groups even today, young girls’ heads are shaved, with the belief that the first hair are impure (Kane II/I 1997:265).

In the BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā, devotees take the son to Pramukh Swami Mahārāj, or senior sadhus, who clip a tuft of hair. The remaining hair is shaved off later. After shaving, the Baudhāyan and other *sutras* enjoin a bath. The barber was gifted a sesame cake and a fine piece of cloth or food. However nowadays, he is given cash.

A tuft of hair (*shikhā*, *chotli*) is left in place at the top of the head for longevity. The Sushrut Samhitā points out its significance, ‘Inside the head, near the top, is the joint of a *shira* (artery) and a *sandhi* (critical juncture). There, in the eddy of nerves, is a vital spot called the *adhipati* (overlord). Any injury to this part causes sudden death’ (Shārīrsthān VI, 83). (see also FAQ p.414). In the course of time, the *shikhā* was regarded as a symbol of Sanātan Dharma and its removal came to be regarded as a grave sin (Laghu Hārit IV). The Kāthak Gruhyasutra (40/7) declared:



chhatthi – annaprāshan of a 6 day old Marwadi child



mundan of a brahmin boy prior to yagnopavit samskāra



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj clipping a lock of hair

Chudākarma was also enjoined by the shāstras for girls (Āshvalāyan Gruhya Sutra I/17/18, Manu Smṛuti 2/66, Yājñavalkya Smṛuti I/13). And for them too, a shikhā was to be kept or they should not be shaved at all:

*Kumārīchanle-pi yathā
kūladdharmamityanu vartate
tatashcha sarvamundanam
shikhādhāranam amundanameva
sidhyati.*

– Samskāraprakāśh p.317.

– the head without a *shikhā* is unholy.

9. *Karnavedh* (piercing the earlobes)

The child's ear lobes are pierced either on the 12th or 16th day; or 6th, 7th or 8th month; or 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th or 9th year. Sushrut reasoned, 'The ears of a child should be pierced for protection (from diseases such as hydrocele and hernia) and decoration' (Sharirasthān 16.1, Chikitsāsthān 19.21). One *sutra* enjoins that a goldsmith should pierce the ears while Sushrut advocates a surgeon. For a boy, the right earlobe is pierced first and for a girl, the left. For boys today, this *samskāra* is only prevalent in some communities such as *rabāris* (cowherds) and states of India such as Rajasthan. In girls, this *samskāra*, has lost its ritual significance and is only performed to enable them to wear earrings.

Educational *samskāras*

10. *Vidyārambh* (learning the alphabet)

This *samskāra* is also known as *Aksharārambha*, *Aksharlekhan*, *Akshara-vikaran* and *Aksharāvishkaran*.

It is performed at the age of five and is necessary before commencing Vedic study – *Vedārambh*.

After bathing, the child sits facing west, while the *āchārya* (teacher) sits facing east. Saffron and rice are scattered on a silver plank. With a gold or silver pen the child is made to write letters on the rice. The following phrases are written: 'Salutation to Ganesh, salutation to Sarasvati (devi of knowledge), salutation to family deities and salutation to Nārāyan and Lakshmi.' The child then writes *Aum namah siddham*. He then presents gifts to the *āchārya*, such as a *pāgh* and *sāfo* (head adornment of cloth). The *āchārya* then blesses the child.

11. *Upanayan* (*Yagnopavit*) (sacred thread initiation)

Upa means 'near.' *Nayan* means 'to take (him) to' – to take the boy to the *āchārya*.

At the age of seven a boy is initiated by the *āchārya* with the sacred thread, known as *janoi* or *yagnopavit*. Amongst all the foregoing *samskāras* this is regarded as supreme. It is the dawn of a new life, hence *dvijā* – twice born.

janmanājāyate shudrah samskārat dvijā uchyate

– a person is born a shudra, but by *samskāras* he becomes a *dvijā*.

In Guruvāyur, Kerala, devotees of Bhagwān Guruvāyurappan have their children initiated into the *vidyārambh* *samskāra* in the Shri Krishna mandir on the sacred Vijayā Dashmi, after the Navrātri festival.



yagna during yagnopavit *samskāra*;
batuk preparing to adorn janoi



The boy enters studentship and a life of perfect discipline which involves *brahmacharya*. He leaves the guardianship of his parents, to be looked after by the *āchārya*. This samskāra is observed by brahmins, kshatriyas and vaishyas. In ancient times both boys and girls receive training in discipline, truthful living and physical service. During the course of time this samskāra ceased to be given to girls.

Like the parents, the *āchārya* will mould the student with love and patience into a man of character. He will inculcate in him the invaluable knowledge of the Vedas. This is the second meaning of *upanayan*. Among all the cultures of the world, none have advocated such a lofty and stringent ideal for studentship than this Hindu samskāra. If a student sincerely observes this samskāra, he will turn into a successful scholar. Additionally during this period, he receives from the *āchārya*, a holistic nurturing for the householder's life he will later enter.

Today, it is obviously not feasible to stay at the *āchārya*'s house. But the next best equivalent is to enter a *chhātrālaya* – boarding school. The discipline involved infuses in the student a fortitude generally not possible at home.

Whereas students wear one *janoi*, householders could wear two; one for himself and one for his wife.

The three strings of the *janoi* denote the three *gunas* – *sattva* (reality), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (darkness). They also remind the wearer that he has to pay off the three debts he owes to the seers, ancestors and deities. The three strings are tied by a knot known as the *brahmagranthi* which symbolises Brahmā (creator), Vishnu (sustainer) and Shiva (leveller). In some Smruti texts the *janoi* is also known as *brahmasutra* (Yajnāvalkyā Smruti 1/16 & 133).

One important significance of wearing the *janoi* is that the wearer would be constantly aware of the different deities which the threads represented. Therefore, he would be vigilant prior to any action not in accordance with the Dharma shāstras.

The Āshvalāyan Gruhyasutras (I/19/1-6) advocated the eighth year for *upanayan* of a brahmin, 11th for a kshatriya and 12th for a vaishya. The Smruti texts also specified the seasons; *Vasant* (spring), *Grishma* (summer) and *Sharad* (autumn), for the above three respectively. The brahmin boy's father or grandfather observes three *kruchchhravrats* (fasts)



Pranukh Swami Mahārāj blessing batuks in Amdavad, 13 June 2003



A bunch of two folded janois (sacred thread)



invitation card for yagnopavit samskāra



batuk holding the traditional palāsh danda with food tied in a bag

and chants the Gāyatri mantra 12,000 times (*anushthān*), prior to the *yagnopavit* rite. Then during the rite he vows (*sankalp*) to grant this merit (*punyaṣal*) to the son (Shri Naimittik Karmaprakāśh p.216-7).

The prescribed garb of the *batuk* was: a white upper garment, a black deer skin around the waist tied with a *mekhalā* (girdle) made of munja (or murva) grass with three strings and a specified number of knots according to family usage, and a *danda* (staff of *palāsh* wood).

12. *Vedārambh* (beginning Vedic study)

This samskāra was not mentioned in the earliest lists of the Dharma sutras, which instead listed the four Vedic vows – *Ved vrats*. It seemed that though upanayan marked the beginning of education, it did not coincide with Vedic study. Therefore a separate samskāra was felt necessary to initiate Vedic study. In this samskāra, each student, according to his lineage, masters his own branch of the Vedas.

13. *Keshānt* (*godān*) (shaving the beard)

This samskāra is included as one of the four *Ved vrats*. When the other three faded, *keshānt* itself became a separate samskāra. *Kesh* means hair and *ant* means ‘end’. *Go* (गो) also means hair, and *da* (दा) ‘to cut’. So *godān* means cutting of hair. This samskāra involves the first shaving of the beard by the student at the age of sixteen. *Godān* also meant gifting a cow to the *āchārya* and gifts to the barber.

Since the student now enters manhood he is required to be more vigilant over his impulses of youth. To remind him of his vow of *brahmacharya*, he is required to take the vow anew; to live in strict continence and austere discipline for one year.

14. *Samāvartan* (end of studentship)

This samskāra is performed at the end of the *brahmacharya* phase – the end of studentship. *Samāvartan* meant ‘returning home from the house of the *āchārya*.’ This involves a ritual sacrificial bath known as *Avabhruth snān*. It is sacrificial because it marks the end of the long sacrifice of *brahmacharya*. It is a ritual bath as it symbolises the crossing of the ocean of learning by the student – hence *vidyāsnātak* – one who has crossed the ocean of learning. In Sanskrit literature, learning is compared to an ocean.



samāvartan – returning home



Before the bath, the student has to obtain permission from the āchārya to end his studentship and give him *guru dakshinā* – tuition fees. Permission is necessary because it certifies the student as a person fit in learning, habit and character for a married life. Obviously the student is not in a position to pay fees. One sutra describes the debt to the teacher as unpayable; ‘Even the earth containing the seven continents is not sufficient for the *gurudakshinā*.’ But the formality is a required courtesy and the āchārya says, ‘My child, enough with money. I am satisfied with thy merits.’ He would elaborate with the impressive statements, known as *dikshānt pravachan*, noted in the Taittiriya Upanishad (I.11).

Those students who wished to remain as lifelong students observing *brahmacharya*, would remain with the āchārya. Today this means accepting a spiritual guru – an Ekāntik Satpurush and becoming a sadhu. The student thus bypasses the next two āshramas, to enter *samnyās āshrama*.

Vivāh samskāras

15. Vivāh (marriage)

This is the most important of all the Hindu samskāras. The Smrutis laud the *gruhashth* (householder) āshrama as the highest, for it is the central support of the other three āshramas.

They also stipulate paying off the three debts:

Brahmacharyena rishibhyo yajnena devebhyaha prajayā pitrubhyaha

– Taittiriya Samhitā VI.3/10/5

– to the rishis by *bramacharya* and Vedic study, to the devas by *yagnas* and to ancestors by offspring. Hence the primary purpose of Hindu marriage is procreation.

Thirdly, a man can only perform religious rites if accompanied by his wife. The devas do not accept oblations performed by a bachelor:

Ayajniyo vaisha yo-patnikaha

– Shatapath Brāhman V.1.6.10

Manu enjoins, ‘Having spent the first quarter of one’s life in the guru’s house, the second quarter in one’s own house with the wife, and the third quarter in the forest, one should take *samnyās* in the fourth, casting away every worldly tie’ (Manu Smruti 4/1). By marriage an individual is able to achieve the four *purushārthas* (endeavours) of life: dharma (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (desire) and moksha (liberation).

धन्यो गृहस्थाश्रम

dhanyo gruhasthāshrama – glory to the householder stage



pujā dravyas

In addition to being a sacrament, Hindu marriage is also regarded as an important social institution. For developing a stable and ideal society, marriage has been regarded as an essential samskāra in all cultures of the world. A society without loyal marital ties tends to degrade. It is said that promiscuity was one reason for ancient Rome's downfall. By marriage, both an individual and society, while remaining within the moral norms, can progress together. Simultaneously it does not cause harm to others nor infringe upon one's independence. This samskāra boosts cultural values and dharma. It upholds and promotes moral righteousness and self control.

Eight types of marriages

Advocated by Manu (3-21), these are divided into two groups: (i) the morally approved (*prashasta*) and (ii) the disapproved (*aprashasta*).

I. *Prashasta*

1) *Brāhm*. This is the purest type. It was so called because it was thought fit for brahmins. In this the girl is given by the father, with such ornaments that he can afford, to a man of character and learning, whom he has invited voluntarily and received respectfully, without taking anything in exchange (Manu Smṛuti 3-17). The Smṛutis consider this type as the most honourable, as it is free from physical force, lust, imposition of conditions and lure of money. Social decency and religious considerations are fully taken into account.

2) *Daiva*. This is the next type, inferior to the *Brāhm*. In this, the girl is ornamented and ritually 'given away' by the father to a pundit who officiates at the *yagna*. The pundit then marries her to the bridegroom. It was called *Daiva* since the gift was made on the occasion of a *Daiva yagna*. This method was prevalent among the first three Hindu classes.

3) *Ārsh*. In this method the father of the bride receives a pair or two of kine – a cow and an ox or two cows and two oxen, from the bridegroom for the purpose of a *yagna* and



forms a part of a religious ritual. The pair of kine was not the bride's price. This method was known as *Ārsh* because it was prevalent among the priestly families. Nonetheless, according to the *Manu Smṛiti* (3-53) accepting a gift, small or large, amounted to a sale.

4) *Prajāpatya*. This involves the father giving away his daughter to a suitor with the specific understanding that they both perform their civic and religious duties together. The name *Prajāpatya* suggests that the couple entered the bond for discharging their duties to *Prajāpati* – for procreating.

From the Western point of view, this type of marriage may be regarded satisfactory because the rights of the husband and wife are equally well secured. But from the view of the Hindu *śāstras*, it is lower than the first three. This is because the daughter is given with mundane conditions. Hence the 'gift' cannot truly be regarded as free.

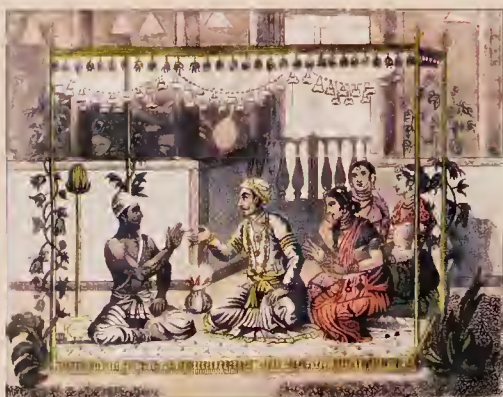
Now we consider the four types of marriage which are not commendable by the *śāstras*.

II. *Aprashasta*

5) *Asura*. The *Manu Smṛiti* (3-31) defines this as, 'Where the husband, having paid money to the relations of the bride and the bride herself, accepts her out of free will; this is called the *Asura* type.' The main consideration in this kind of marriage is money and it is, in reality, a purchase. *Manu* condemns it, 'The learned father of the girl should not accept even the least amount of price. Accepting the price out of greed, he becomes the seller of children' (3-51). The *Aitareya Brahmana* (I.16) brands this type as *pashu vivāha* – animal marriage. Today this form of marriage is still prevalent in certain sections of Hindu society, where a dowry is demanded by the bridegroom's father from the bride's father. Public opinion has begun to frown upon dowry. Religious and social leaders have been rallying against it. Pramukh Swami Mahārāj has always condemned it. During the International Youth Festival in Vallabh Vidyanagar in 1990, he inspired 21,000 young men and women to take a vow of refusing dowry. To



Samuh Lagna – mass dowry-free marriage – convened during Yogiji Mahārāj's centenary celebrations 1992, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.



priest officiating a marriage, south India (water colour; 1822)

those who cannot afford the marriage costs, he arranges mass dowry-free marriages during grand festivals and *yagnas*.

6) *Gāndharva*. According to Manu, 'Where the bride and bridegroom meet each other of their own accord and the union is consummated in passion, that form is called *Gāndharva*' (3-32). The name *Gāndharva* is derived from a tribe of that name living in the Himalayas, in which it was a common occurrence. It was more prevalent among the *kshatriyas*, as they represented the most independent group in society. The majority of the law givers discouraged it on religious and moral grounds. It was regarded as lower than the first five forms, because it was performed without sacred rituals and it originated from passion, a factor which seemed tenuous.

7) *Rākshas*. Manu says, 'Capture of a girl by force while she is crying, having killed, scattered and injured her relatives, is called *rākshas vivāh*' (3-21). This usually occurred during war or political upheavals. The *kshatriyas* usually practised this since they participated in war and obtained women as war booties. The word *rākshas* means demonic.

8) *Paishāch*. This was the least approved. Manu defines this as, 'Cohabiting with a girl in loneliness, when she is sleepy, mad or intoxicated' (3-34). Obviously, this was the most uncivilized and barbaric method. *Paishāch* means 'of witches'.

Hindu marriage sentiments

Monogamy remains *Sanātan Dharma*'s ideal. The ancient *śāstras* cite *Shiva* and *Pārvati*, *Rāma* and *Sītā*, *Nala* and *Damayanti*, and *Satyavān* and *Sāvitrī* as exemplary.

Earlier, the Hindu marriage system was also described as a religious and social institution. More important is that it is a union of two *atmas* rather than just two individuals. To consider this metaphysically, an individual is made up of three bodies: physical, composed of matter (*sthul*), subtle, composed of mind (*sukshma*) and causal, composed of the *jiva* (*kāran*). The Vedic marriage is a union between all the three: matter with matter, mind with mind and *jiva* with *jiva*. With its sacramental vows, the couple embark on a journey



together to attain the four endeavours (*purushārthas*) of life, mentioned earlier. During this journey, the couple satisfies their desires – to earn, to beget children, and to serve society. Added to this, they follow the path of *bhakti* – devotion and therein discover the divinity within themselves, of Brahman and Parabrahman. This spiritual development of two independent individuals is effected by marriage, which neither could achieve alone.

Concept of equality

Additionally, the *shāstras* assert that man and wife form one whole. The wife is half-self; *ardhāngi*. This concept of half-man and half-woman, known as *ardhnārishvar*, is often depicted by a single *murti* depicting two halves of Shankar and Pārvati.

The Sanskrit word for the couple, *dampati*, etymologically means that the husband and wife are the joint owners of the household:

Dāmpatyō sahādhikārāt

– the wife is called *patni* on account of equality of rights with her husband.

Sanātan Dharma's lofty ideal of equality signifies interdependence and mutual co-operation. The Mālatimādhav (VI.18) declared, 'The husband and wife are to each other the best of friends, the essence of all relationship, the fulfillment of all desires, the very life itself. So is the husband to the wife and the wife to the husband':

*Preyo mitram bandhutā vā samagrā sarvekāmāhā sevādhir jeevitam vā
Streenām bhartā dharmadārāshcha pumsām iti anyonyam vatsayor jnātam astu.*

Sitāji accompanied Shri Rāma in exile to share his suffering. Gāndhāri blindfolded her eyes lest she should enjoy a pleasure denied to her blind husband, Dhrutarāshtra.

The wife, declares a Vedic hymn, is the true friend of man:

Sakhā ha jāyā

– Aitareya Brāhman VII. 3,13.

However as a wife, she is to try her utmost to promote her husband's happiness (Mahābhārat 12/144/20). Her own happiness is centred in her husband's (Rāmāyan 2/27,6; 2/40,3).

As for the husband, his most sacred duty is to maintain and support his wife at all cost; otherwise he has no right to



*Shankar & Pārvati as Ardhnārishvar,
marble pillar,
BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir,
Houston, USA.*

be called a husband (Mahābhārat 12/272,37). He must observe his vow of fidelity; its violation is the greatest sin he can commit (Manu 10-101).

Equality also prevailed in the study of shāstras and spiritual pursuit since ancient times. The Rig Veda contains *suktas* (hymns) composed by 27 women seers, known as *Brahmavādinis*. Some well known *brahmavādinis* of the Upanishads include: Gārgi, Maitreyi, Katyayani and Shandily.

In the early 19th century, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan introduced a similar, yet unique order of women known as *Sāmkhyayoginis*. Married, unmarried or widowed women could study religious literature and impart instruction to other women in specially designated areas of mandir precincts, aloof from men. They accepted Paramātmā as *Param Pati* – supreme husband.

They offered Him exuberant devotion, observed harsh austerities and the highest asceticism to earn His grace.

Concept of ātmā in marital discord

The fundamental basis of a Vedic marriage is to regard each other as the ātmā. Only when the concept of the ātmā is fully grasped, can Sanātan Dharma's true meaning of equality be appreciated. Failing this, body-consciousness, known as dehabhāv, overrides all venerable aspects of marital union; culminating in the destruction of: patibhāv (as husband), dehabhāv (as deity), pitābhāv (as father) and sakhābhāv (as friend). It is unique in all the world's cultures – which primarily observe the Gāndharva system based on passion. The Gāndharva system, being generally associated with dehabhāv and rarely with the ātmā, is more prone to marital discord, relative to the four Prashasta types.

At the root of any marital discord lies intolerance due to body-consciousness and one's ego – the 'I' and 'mine'. If the couple is united by ātmā for a common, ultimate goal, moksha, then 'I' and 'you' cease to exist. This is because 'I' and 'you' are empirically ātmā. And when 'I' and 'you' are believed to be ātmā, where is the conflict that would otherwise arise from selfish motives and desires? Therefore, in a Hindu marriage when



conflicts and differences arise, they are easily resolved. The couple considers each other as *ātmā*, for the *ātmā* is immutable, genderless, eternal, and inherently divine (Gitā 2/24, 25). *Vivāh* itself means 'to lift, to support, to uphold, to sustain'. Admittedly, both spouses have to make sacrifices and efforts to imbibe this lofty philosophy. It is not an overnight process, more a lifelong, sacred commitment. It is this philosophy which has made the Vedic marriage a grand success for thousands of years. Only the recent encroachment of Western belief systems, primarily based on superficial and mundane factors, have begun to ruin the sanctity of today's Hindu marriages.

The aforementioned sentiments and a few others are symbolically depicted and verbally consolidated by mantras during the actual *vivāh* rites. These vary considerably among Hindus of different social sections and regions of India. The following are those most commonly practised rites in Gujarat.

A married woman's 16 shanagār (ornaments)

1. <i>mardan</i>	—	<i>massage</i>
2. <i>chira</i>	—	<i>sari</i>
3. <i>hār</i>	—	<i>garland</i>
4. <i>tilakam</i>	—	<i>bindi</i>
5. <i>netrānjanam</i>	—	<i>collyrium in eyes</i>
6. <i>kundalam</i>	—	<i>ear rings</i>
7. <i>nāsāmauktik</i>	—	<i>nose gem</i>
8. <i>pushpamālākaranam</i>	—	<i>garland of flowers</i>
9. <i>jankār nupuram (pāyal)</i>	—	<i>tinkling anklet</i>
10. <i>ange chandan lepanam</i>	—	<i>chandan smearing on body</i>
11. <i>kanchukā</i>	—	<i>buckle on head</i>
12. <i>mani</i>	—	<i>gem</i>
13. <i>kshudrāvali</i>	—	<i>necklace (mangal sutra)</i>
14. <i>ghantikā</i>	—	<i>small bell</i>
15. <i>tāmbul</i>	—	<i>betel leaf</i>
16. <i>karkankanam</i>	—	<i>hand string or ornament</i>

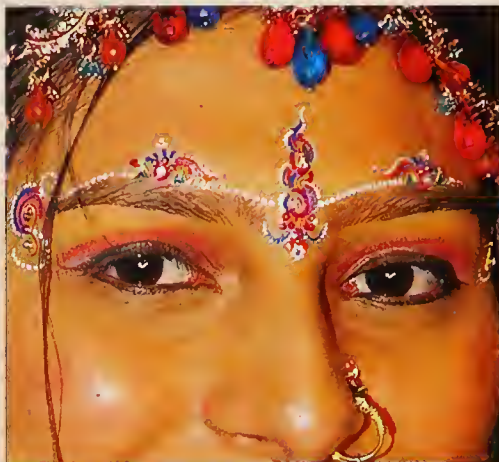
There is an interesting reference in the *shāstras* about the importance of four of the above ornaments. When Sitāji visited Sati Ansuyā with Shri Rāma, Ansuya gifted her beautiful clothes and adorned on her the following four ornaments, explaining their significance:



vivāh samskāra conducted before Bhagwān Guruvāyurappan in the *kalyān mandapam* of the Shri Krishna temple, Guruvāyur, Kerala



it is a tradition in Madurai, for couples to get married in the Meenakshi mandir on the first day after Chaturmās

*kankan**mangal sutra**tilak*

Ornament	Significance
<i>kankan</i>	its sound denotes that the woman is active.
<i>pāyal</i>	its tinkling indicates that the woman is sincerely implementing the necessary activities in her home.
<i>mangal sutra</i>	a gem made of glass in the <i>mangal sutra</i> indicates its fragility. It is also to be worn on a fragile part of the body (neck). This symbolises a woman's <i>saubhāgya</i> (married status) and her womanhood (<i>nāritva</i>). A glass gem once broken cannot be repaired. Therefore it has to be protected with extreme vigilance. Similarly, the woman's <i>sheel</i> (chastity) is just as important. Protecting her <i>sheel</i> remains a woman's foremost dharma. Once tainted, her <i>sheel</i> cannot be mended, just as a broken gem cannot be repaired.
<i>tilak</i>	beautifies the forehead. It is mute. By remaining mute, it increases the woman's purity and character, as well as auspiciousness. Since it lies on the uppermost part of the body, it supervises all actions of the woman. Without a tilak, a woman's character is considered void (vacuum). Source: <i>Chāndlo – Bindi – Tilaka</i> (Shah 1998: 46-47).



Vivāh samskāras

In the old days, the groom also shaved his head prior to the marriage ceremony. In the Uttar Rāmacharit of Bhavabhuti, all four sons of king Dashrath (father of Shri Rāma) had their heads shaved before marriage.

Hindu shāstras emphatically stress the importance of *brahmacharya* prior to marriage, in respect of sacred parenthood and for the character of the offspring:

Shri Rāma asks Lakshman:

*Pushpam drushtwā falam drushtwā, drushtwā strinām cha yauwanam,
Trini rupāni drushtwaiwa kasya no chalate manaha.*

– whose mind is not deflected on seeing a flower, a fruit and a beautiful woman?

Lakshman answers:

*Pitā yasya shoochirbhuto mātā yasya pativratā,
Oobhābhyāmewa sambhutastasya no chalate manaha.*

– an individual who is brought up by a father who is pure, and a mother who is a *pativratā* – chaste, his mind will not be deflected (on seeing the above three objects).

Similarly the Sati Gitā declares, ‘Only when a man’s *punyas* (sacred merits) of a 100 births manifest, is he fortunate enough to be wedded to a wife who is staunch in dharma and a *pativratā*.’

Therefore with such pure lives, of chastity, the bride and the bridegroom enter the marriage *mandap*. Each offers this purity as a supreme tribute to the other. ‘No other gift can quite compensate for the loss of this,’ asserts S. Radhakrishnan in *Religion and Society*. Pramukh Swami Mahārāj similarly lauds such purity and often exhorts young people to imbibe it sincerely as a sacred sacrament.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s one major contribution to Gujarat was reforming the *vivāh* samskāras, re-establishing the Vedic rites of Hindu *vivāh*.

Today, after over two centuries, it is important that Hindus should be aware of, understand and be inspired to implement these Vedic rites.

Vāg dān (betrothal)

Vāchā dānam iti vāg dānam – means the parents of the bride promise to marry their daughter to the groom, and the parents of the groom agree and accept the bride-to-be as their son’s wife and daughter-in-law.



mehndi – preparation for vivāh

This is an important ritual and custom, as both the families come closer and have time to adjust to each other. Even today, a broken engagement is acceptable in society but a broken marriage poses many questions, especially for the woman.

Lagna patrikā (marriage invitation)



purohit writing lagna patrikā

Once the marriage date is fixed and agreed by both families at the bride's place, usually 10 to 15 days previously, in a good *muhurt*, the brahmin, after invoking Bhagwān, Ganesh, Kuldev, writes the letter of invitation to the groom's parents to come and get their son married with the bride, on the selected day and time. The groom's family and relatives are invited with all fanfare (see sample opposite).

This invitation letter or *lagna patrikā* is now written with red ink or pen. Earlier, it was always written in *kanku* (kumkum), then smeared with rice grains, and greeted by female members by taking the letter's *dukhnā* / *ovāranā*. (Females touch the object with their fingers, palms open and then they crack their knuckles on their temples. Taking *dukhnā* / *ovāranā* has the inner sentiment that "let the ceremony be without any obstacles. If there are any, let them come to me instead".

Kankotri (kumkum patrikā) invitation



Ganesh sthāpan

Both parties; the bride's and groom's, now invite their relatives, social business friends according to the individual's personal and financial capacity, to attend the marriage ceremony and grace the occasion. The *kankotri* begins with 'Shri Ganeshay Namah', followed by other divinities and spiritual guru.

The *kankotri* provides details of the couple, their parents, time and date of marriage and venue, alongwith the schedule of other *vivāh* rituals like *mandap muhurt*, etc. (see sample opposite).

The very first *kankotri* is always addressed to Shri Ganesh, followed by Bhagwān, Kuldev/Kuldevi, spiritual guru and then the relatives.

Mandap muhurt

This is the first *vivāh* rite performed at both the bride's and the groom's homes.

At the scheduled, auspicious time, *mānek sthambh* – a wooden nail approximately 8" long, is tied with the *nādā*



mānek sthambh



धन्वो गृहस्थाश्रमः



Shri Ganeshāy Namah



Shri Swaminārāyanāy Namah

Mānglik Shubh Vivāh



Ganesh Sthāpan/Mandap Muhurt

Dt.

Time



Grah Shānti

Dt.

Time



Dinner

Dt.

Time



Jān Prasthān

Dt.

Time



Hasta Melāp

Dt.

Time



Kanyā Vidāy

Dt.

Time

With the divine grace and blessings of
Bhagwān Swāminārāyan & His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Mahārāj

Shri & Shrimati

request the company of

Shri & Shrimati

to grace the auspicious occasion of the Wedding Ceremony of

Lakshmi

(daughter of Shri & Shrimati

to

Nārāyan

(son of Shri & Shrimati

to be celebrated at:

Please accept this card as a personal invitation.

chhadi and the *purohit* chants shlokas and firmly pushes it into the soil or ties it firmly to a support, where it will remain firm, and will not shake, till the rites are complete. The underlying sentiment is to ensure and pray for the marriage to remain firm and on solid ground. A *chandarvo* (square decorated cloth) is then tied in the porch of the house, underwhich *grahshānti* rites are performed.

Ganesh mātli

Though now practically forgotten, this was an important custom wherein the women folk visited the local potter's house, worship the wheel and bring home a *mātli* (pot), alongwith other earthen vessels to be used in *pujā*, during the rites. The wheel is symbolic of progress and the earthen *mātli* of mankind's bondage with nature – *Panch mahābhut*. *Ganesh mātli* is followed by *Gotraj-pujan*.

Gotraj puja

Gotra means dynasty, 'j' means born. Born in a dynasty. Any auspicious event in the family is a time to thank and seek blessings of elders.

Using kumkum, 28 spots are imprinted on the east or north wall, honouring seven devis (Shri, Lakshmi, Dhruvi, Medhā, Svāhā, Pragnā, Saraswati), who perpetuate ancestry. Alongwith them Om, Shri, Surya and Chandra are also imprinted (see right margin).

Mindhal bandhan

At both the place, bride's and groom's immediately after the *pujanvidhi*, *mindhol* (Sans. *madanfal*, Lat. *Randia dumentorum*) is tied with a *nādā chhadi* on the right hand only. *Mindhal* is an emetic, to be given in case of poisoning.

A *mindhal-bandhā* groom is given greater respect than even a king. Hence he becomes *Var-Rājā*. The *Var Rājā*'s 'kingdom' ends as soon as the marriage ceremony ends. At the bride's place, she becomes *Kanyā-Ratna*, a jewel and is respected equally like a jewel.



pujan of chandarvo



pujan of the potter's wheel & pots



Gotraj puja with 28 spots



decorative mindhal tied on wrist of groom



grah shānti rite

Grah shānti

This rite is to appease *Nav Grahas* (nine planets) to help complete the *vivāh* rites without any obstacles. It is performed by both families after clay and five pots, known as *gotardā* are brought.

Pithi vāno (hāridralepan)

Pithi means *ubatan*, an oily cream made by mixing a powder of *muth*, *udad*, *haldi*, *kapur kāchali* and for fragrance, quality scents of choice. On the day before marriage, the cream is smeared over both the bride and groom at their homes. This is known as *pithi cholvi* in Gujarati and *hāridralepan* in Sanskrit.



hāridralepan (pithi cholvi)



Even today in southern India, *haldi* is applied on open body parts, especially the face to remove suntan. Earlier, when agriculture was the only source of livelihood, people had to spend long hours in the sun, acquiring a deep tan. In many places, *pithi* has now become a mere token ritual. But its purpose was to enhance lustre, smoothen and tighten the skin. *Pithi* was applied with merrymaking and singing songs.

Once the *pithi vāno* is over, the maternal uncle or maternal family members will offer *māmeru* – usually cash

offering – to the groom/bride. The tradition has roots in that this was an indirect way of helping the family to tie over marriage expenses. Thus *māneru* is an indirect way to help the families of both the bride and groom.

Sānji/Prabhātiyā

In recent years catering services and contractors are easily available. Earlier, the family's womenfolk, neighbours and guests who would attend the marriage, all joined together to help household chores, especially preparation of sweets, *farsān* and other snacks. The womenfolk would do the work while singing marriage songs to ease the burden of work. These were devotional bhajans. Those sung in the evening are known as *sānji*, while those sung in the morning are *prabhātiyā*. *Patāsā* are then given to everybody.

Ukardi (besādvī/uthādavi)

Ukardi means a small waste heap. This was once again a very important symbolic tradition that has become almost extinct in urban areas. It is still practised in some rural areas.

The chief woman of the family will hold a *Rāman Divado* in hand, in the evening hours. Another woman will hold a *shrifal* on a copper pot on her head. She also carries an earthen *samput* (two earthen *kodiyā* – crucibles – tied by a *nādā chhadi*, like joining palms together) which contains a betelnut (*sopāri*), a nail, a coin, ghee and *gor* (jaggery). All women folk present will join them, sing and move from the house to a short distance, where there is some open space. Here they dig a small pit and bury the *samput*. This ritual is known as *ukardi besādi*. The *samput* symbolises past incidents of any known or unknown discord by the family members.

Once the *vivāh* rites are over, the womenfolk go to that spot and while singing, dig out the *samput*, break it and pick-out only the coin. This is *ukardi uthādavi*, which symbolises that 'we shall now remember harmony and fraternity by all who attended the *vivāh*'.

The rites and rituals performed until now remained common at both places.

Then at the groom's place, they will prepare to depart at an auspicious time (*shubh muhurt*) given by the *purohit* and at the bride's place, they prepare to welcome the groom and his entourage (*jān*).



māneru



patāsā (sweet candy)



rāman divado



burying ukardi



jān prasthān



jān swāgat



sāmāiyun



ponkhanu rites

Jān prasthān

When the groom leaves his house with his family and relatives for the bride's place, this is known as *Jān Prasthān*. Before leaving, the groom prays to Shri Ganesh, Bhagwān, spiritual guru and family deities, for the *vivāh* samskāras to proceed smoothly.

Jān swāgat (welcome)

The *jān* (groom's party) is met at a known landmark by elders of the bride's family. They greet each other and escort the *jān* to the place of marriage. The *jān* is provided temporary lodging facilities to refresh and prepare for the *vivāh* rites. They are served a light breakfast.

Sāmāiyun

At a scheduled place, the groom is greeted usually by the bride's younger sister or in her absence, by any young unmarried girl, preferably a teenager, as a good omen. She imprints *chāndlo* on his forehead and serves water sweetened with jaggery.

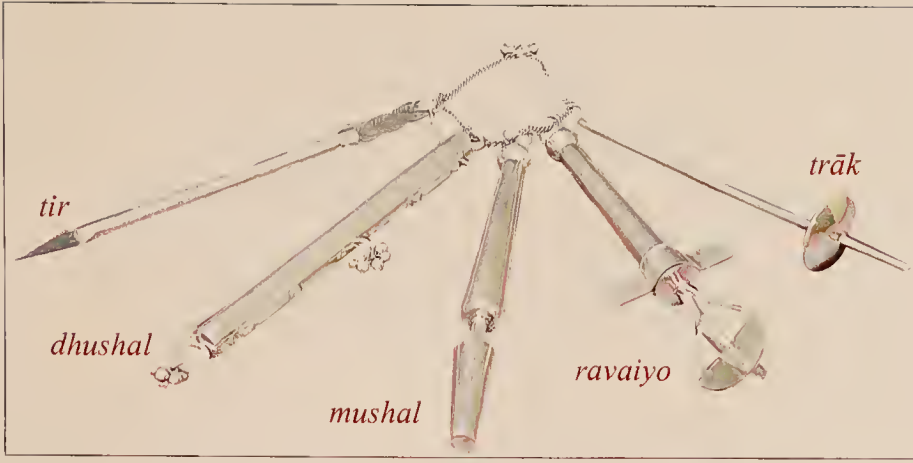
Ponkhanu

Once this is over, the groom stands on a *bājōth* (small stool), ready for *ponkhanu*. The bride's mother or *bhabhi* (brother's wife) or a senior female, wearing a *mod* on her forehead, will perform the *ponkhanu* rites. *Modh* is a heavy, broad, decorative head-band, worn only in marriage ceremonies. Perhaps the custom originated to distinguish the bride's mother from all womenfolk present, since traditionally every woman's face was veiled by saris, a custom known as *Lāj kādavi*.

The woman performing *ponkhanu* greets the groom with five objects – *dhushal*, *mushal*, *ravaiyo*, *trāk* and *tir*, hidden in her sari's *pālav* (fold). She then throws five *muthiyā*, made from ash and wheat flour, in five directions to ward off anybody's evil feelings or evil intentions to spoil the ceremony.

The five objects are symbolic of the social life of yore:

The five articles symbolically convey that, 'we pray to Bhagwān that you prosper in your agriculture (*dhushal*),



trāk – a wheeled *trāk* helps prepare thread from cotton.

tir – has two meanings. An arrow represents valour and protection to the family. *Tir* also means the main wooden pillar of a ship, on which the sail is tied. Seafaring for business has remained Gujarat's economic strength over the centuries.

dhushal – the wooden bough which ties two bullocks for ploughing.

mushal – the wooden, heavy rod used for separating husk from grain in an iron pot. The harvested grains were chafed thus.

ravaiyo – In rural India, the *ravaiyo* is still used to churn buttermilk.

harvest (*mushal*), dairy products – ghee, butter, milk etc. (*ravaiyo*), clothes (*trāk*) and valour or (seafaring) prosperity (*tir*).’

During this ceremony, it is common knowledge that this woman will try to pull the groom's nose. He in turn will try to protect it. This teasing adds a light mood to the ritual. The groom then steps down from the *bājōth*, breaks a *samput* and enters the *mandap*.



samput to be broken

Mahyāru

The formalities of welcoming over, the groom is led to *mahyāru*, the *mandap*, where he will tie knots with his lifemate. The *mandap* is always well-decorated and the seats of both the bride and groom are royal. The four pillars of the *mandap* are tied with seven pots each, a unique symbol of marriage in progress. This is known as *chori*.

The *purohit* then chants shlokas to invoke Shri Vishnu in the groom. In a ritual known as *vistar* – a seat (*āsan*) is offered to the groom by the bride's parents. Then they perform his *pujan* by imprinting *chāndlo* and washing his feet with milk, with the sentiments: *Shri Vishnurupāyai*



groom led into the mandap



washing the groom's feet,
symbolic of Vishnu



pujan of the bride's feet,
symbolic of Lakshmi



curtain (antarpat)



pāni grahan – accepting the bride's
hand

varāy namah – obeisance to the groom who represents Vishnu. The bride's parents similarly perform *pujan* of the bride, by imprinting *chāndlo* and washing her feet, with the sentiments: *Shri Mahālakshmiswarupāyai kanyākāyai namah* – obeisance to the bride who represents Lakshmi. Then the bride's parents offer *argya* to the groom.

Madhu parka

Then follows the *madhu parka* rite. The bride's parents offer the groom yogurt which he stirs three times with a coin and then sprinkles it three times on the ground with the coin. Then he tastes the yogurt three times using the coin.

Nyās

Purificatory rites of the body are performed of the groom.

Antarpat

A curtain (*antarpat*) is placed before the groom to veil his vision, while the bride is led into the *mandap* by her maternal uncle. The *antarpat* is then lifted. This is the first occasion during the *vivāh* rites when the bride and groom see each other.

Both the bride and groom garland each other and the *vivāh* rites are started.

Pāni grahan (hastamelāp)

During this rite, the father's bride offers her right hand to the groom with the sentiments: 'I am entrusting this Lakshmi *swarup* bride as a wife to you – who is Vishnu *swarup*.' This is the most sacred part of the Hindu *vivāh* *samskāra*, since Lakshmi and Nārāyan are actually invoked in the couple, rendering the whole rite into a divine sacrament rather than a mere customary ritual. The groom replies, '*mayā-pi pratigruhitā* – I have accepted this.'

An interesting Vedic rite, *chhedā-chhedi* marks the beginning of *Saptapadi*, seven steps of marriage. In this, one corner of the bride's sari (*gharcholu* in Gujarati), is tied with a white or yellow *upvastra*, a long cloth worn by the groom. This is symbolic of two *atmas* uniting as one. Before tying the knot, five objects are placed in the knot, as a symbol of five prayers:

- a flower – to remain pure and always blossomed,
- *haldi* – to grant good health for ever (*haldi* is also symbolic of *gurubhāṇ* – not to have any inferiority complex – *laghutāgranthi*, in mind),

- *akshat* (rice grain) – to grant a long married life, and to fulfill social and family responsibilities as a couple,

- *durvā* – to grant eternal freshness symbolised by the greenness, since *durvā* remains green even after drying. It is a symbolic prayer to provide eternal love and oneness between the couple.

- a coin – to provide wealth and riches of life, on which both the partners will have equal rights.

Chhedā-chhedi thus symbolises prayer for purity (flower), health (*haldi*), longevity (*akshat*) and eternal love and oneness (*durvā*) and wealth (coin).

Agni parikramā (circumambulating the sacred fire)

The yagna fire is kindled and the couple perform four rounds of *Agni* – the fire deity. On the first three rounds the bride leads the groom and on the fourth, the groom leads the bride. Before each round an offering is made. This rite is known as *mangal ferā* in Gujarati. The four rounds are symbolic for attaining the four endeavours of life; dharma, *artha*, *kāma* and moksha. For the first three rounds, the bride follows the groom's steps, symbolising that she will follow her husband in the first three endeavours. However, in the fourth and final round, she leads her husband, assuring that she will take care of moksha for both of them! This is the lofty sentiment of equality conferred upon the wife by Sanātān Dharma.

The symbolic truth to be accepted by both the bride and groom is that their individual egos, separate identities have melted and become one *ātmā*.

Once the four rounds (*ferā*) are over, the couple is married.

While taking four rounds, the bride's brother(s) is invited to please Agnideva by offering *jav-til* (barley-sesame) in the *kund*. By this, they take a vow to protect his sister's *saubhāgya*, with Agnideva as witness.



offering *mālā* to each other



hastamelāp



chhedā-chhedi dravyas



mangal ferā – groom leads the bride



jav-til



offering jav-til to Agnideva



mangal ferā – bride leads the groom



saptapadi

Saptapadi (seven steps)

After *mangal ferā* and *Prajāpatya hom*, the couple take seven steps northwards and pledge seven vows. Instead of taking seven steps, it is now common for the bride to hold the groom's right toe and make it touch in sequence, seven betelnuts – which symbolically represent seven heaps of rice. The seven steps and their vows are given below. The groom then performs the same rite with the bride's toe. The groom is the embodiment Vishnu and the bride, Lakshmi.

(1) *Aum ekamishe Vishnustvā nayatu*

– O bride! I, the embodiment of Vishnu, grant you the care of rich heaps of food. She replies and vows: You have kept under my care, wealth and food in your house, so I may truly serve your parents, sister and others.

(2) *Aum dve urije Vishnustvā nayatu*

– O bride! I, Vishnu, bring you here to strengthen my vigour.

She vows: While nourishing your family, I will strengthen its foundation, ever be sweet-tongued, never utter a biting word. In adversity, I will be forbearing; in your happiness, happy, in your unhappiness, unhappy.

(3) *Aum trini rāyasposhāya Vishnustvā nayatu*

– O bride! I, Vishnu, make you the mistress of my wealth and for our prosperity.

She vows: I shall remain pure and never admit any other person into my mind.

(4) *Aum chatvāri māyobhavāya Vishnustvā nayatu*

– O bride! I, Vishnu bring you here for mutual happiness.

She vows: All my adornments will be to please you.

(5) *Aum pancha pashubhyo Vishnustvā nayatu*

– O bride! I, Vishnu grant you the well-being of my cattle-wealth (and my property).

She vows: My friends and I shall always devotedly worship Gauri for your well-being and I shall always be devoted to you.

(6) *Aum rutubhyo Vishnustvā nayatu*

– O bride! I, Vishnu, bring you here for the pleasures of the six seasons.

She vows: When you perform *yagnas*, offer oblations or alms, I shall be there next to you.

(7) *Aum sakhe saptapadā bhava sā māmanuvratā bhava Vishnustvā nayatu*

– O friend! I, Vishnu, request you to serve and follow me with fidelity in all the seven steps.

She vows: O Kulottama (the supreme in your clan)! My joy is boundless, for you have become my husband with all noble men as witnesses, in a ritual performed strictly according to Vedic injunctions ordained by Brahmā.

Then, using mango leaves, the groom sprinkles sanctified water from the *kalash* on the bride's head, while the pundit chants mantras conferring disease-free health on the bride.

Kansār

On completion of *ferā* – rounds, *kansār* is offered to the groom. The bride's mother brings rice flour, ghee and powdered sugar. She puts all these in a plate one by one. The *anvar*, groom's attendant, mixes it. The bride brings the *kansār* four times to the groom's lips. The groom does likewise to her. This *kansār* is not to be eaten.

Today, instead of *kansār*, *pendā* are offered and relished! *Saubhāgya chinha* (blessing the bride): The groom blesses the bride by putting kumkum (vermillion powder) or *sindur* at the parting of her hair or on her forehead and by giving her a *mangalsutra* (sacred necklace).

Saubhāgyavati

To bless the bride, women from both families, only those whose husbands are alive – *saubhāgyavati* – greet the bride and murmur, their blessings in her right ear: 'May you get the fidelity equivalent to that of Shiva-Pārvati in your married life.' Shiva-Pārvati is the immortal, eternally blessed couple on earth. Additionally In some places, Lakshmi-Nārāyan, Krishna-Rukshmani, Indra-Indrāni or Brahmā-Sāvitrī's blessings are also uttered.

Dhruva pujā

The groom accepts the bride as his wife and tells her to look at the Dhruva star (star of steadfastness) and at Arundhati (star of devotion). If the marriage is performed at night, the groom tells her to be firm in her love and duty, and to be devoted to him like Arundhati was to the sage Vashishtha. In reply, the bride assures the groom that she will follow their example and remain devoted.



offering kansār



saubhāgya chinha with sindur



adorning the mangal sutra



saubhāgyavati women blessing the bride



Māh mātlu, Kanyā vidāy

The time has come for the bride to leave her family permanently. She will need food on the way. Since she cannot eat alone, food is offered in a *māhya-maat* – a metal pot (steel/brass), in which, traditionally, sweets, *sunvali*, *vadi*, *pāpad*, *mathiā*, etc., are filled and the opening is covered with a silk cloth and tied.



paidu sinchvu

A *shrifal* is put under the wheel of the newlywed's car (formerly an ox-cart) and broken. This ritual is known as *paidu sinchvu*, which also helped provide extra food (coconut) for the journey.

The *jān* departs homewards.

Ponkhanu

Before the newlyweds enter their home, the groom's mother performs the *ponkhanu* – rite of the bride as performed by the bride's mother earlier, conveying her heartfelt blessings for prosperity to the new couple.



shikh rite – entry tax

However before the bride can enter the house, the groom's unmarried younger sister, or a younger girl of the family, stands in the doorway and demands the entry tax – *shikh* – to be paid to her, since she will be the key link in the newly-wed's life. She firmly holds onto the bride's sari till she is gifted. She then allows her to enter.

Kumkum paglā

Since the bride is auspicious and regarded as Lakshmi, she is made to put both her feet in a dish with wet *kanku*. Feet wet with *kanku*, she walks seven steps in the house. These first steps render her *Gruha Lakshmi*, who will bring prosperity to the house.



first step of kumkum paglā

Untying the *chhedā-chhedi* knot

In the house, the couple then first approach Ganeshji to seek his blessings. Then they bow down to all family elders to seek their blessings.

It is customary that the knots tied during *hastamelāp*, are untied either at the Ganesh *sthāpan* spot in the house, or at the family deity's shrine (*Kuldeva*). In the latter case, the knotted cloth is preserved and carried there for untying.

The new couple is now free, as the *vivāh* rites are complete. The *Var-Rājā* becomes his own self once again. However, the *Kanyā-Ratna* (bride jewel) is transformed to *Gruha Lakshmi*.

After *vivāh*, when the wife first steps inside her husband's home, her *sāsu* (mother-in-law), welcomes her by imprinting kumkum on her feet. The underlying sentiment is that she is welcoming Lakshmi into her home.

In some communities, her *sāsu* offers her a pot of wheat grains. The bride hurls the grains backwards over her head. The latent sentiment is that 'just as the grains pervade the whole home, she, as *Gruha Lakshmi* pledges to completely pervade her husband's home and augur prosperity.

On completion of all the *vivāh* rites, three rites are performed at both the bride's and husband's homes:

- visarjan of Ganeshji – by lightly shifting his wooden stand.
- removal of *ukardi*.
- removal of the *chandarvo* (canopy) or a string from it.

After marriage, in the BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan sampradāya, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj exhorts a newly-wed couple to perform a pilgrimage to the sampradāya's sacred shrines in Gujarat (or the nearest mandir for those outside India), rather than going on a honeymoon. There are several reasons for this: to pay homage to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, the Gunātī paramparā and devas, pray for a harmonious marriage with financial stability, for children of character and samskāras and to attain together the goal of life, *Ekāntik Dharma*.



kumkum paglā



untying chhedā-chhedi



sāsu offering wheat grains to the new Gruha Lakshmi



newly-weds performing abhishek of Shri Neelkanth Varni in BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Atlanta, after vivāh samskāra

Mrityu samskāras

16. Antyeshti samskāras (death rites)

The rishis and Dharma Sutras were at a consensus regarding the final goal of life, which they enjoined in the four *āshramas* – stages of life. The Raghuvamsh (18) stipulates:

*Shaishave abhyastavidyānām yauvane vishayaishinām
Vārdhake munivruttinām yogenānte tanutyajām*

– one studies during childhood (*brahmacharya āshrama*), fulfils his desires during youth (*gruhasth āshrama*), renounces worldly activity for silent contemplation during old age (*vānprasth āshrama*) and then endeavours to realise Paramātmā, after which he leaves his body.

Antyeshti then is the final samskāra for a Hindu. Yajur Veda regards *vivāh* as the sixteenth samskāra while Rig Veda considers *antyeshti*. Though performed after the death of a person by his relatives, it is of importance because the value of the next world is higher than that of the present. The final rites are performed with meticulous care with the help of brahmin pundits.

The first rite after death is to place one or two tulsi leaves and a few drops of Gangā water in the mouth of the deceased. BAPS followers also use *Akshar Deri jal* (sacred water from Akshar Deri, Gondal). The body is then laid on



Decorated bier, south India. Rather than mourn, relatives and friends accompany the bier in a joyous mood, since the deceased has escaped the miserable samsāra and is now happier.



the floor, which has been purified by applying cowdung. Old clothes are removed and the body is bathed with sanctified water or even *panchāmrut* followed by water. The body is then covered with one piece of a new, unbleached, uncut cloth known as *kafan*. The body is then laid on a bier (*nanāmi*) made of bamboo canes tied with jute strings. The underlying message in removing the old clothes can be gleaned from a Sanskrit shloka:

*Dhanāni bhumau pashavashcha goshthe
Nāri gruha dwāre sakhā smashāne
Dehashchitāyām paraloka mārge
Dharmānugo gachchhati jiva ekaha.*

– wealth remains buried, cattle remains in the pen, (his) wife accompanies (him) to the doorway, friends accompany (him) to the crematorium, the body comes till the pyre, but on the path to the next world, the *jiva* goes alone (with his karmas).

In the BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan sampradāya there is a unique ritual. Where possible, sadhus are invited, who then perform puja of the deceased. They imprint a *chāndlo* on the forehead with *chandan*. They place a new *kanthi* and flower garlands around the neck. Together with the nearest relatives, they then do *ārti*, followed by five *pradakshinā*, of the deceased. During *pradakshinā*, everyone present chants the Swāminārāyan mantra (see p.316). The sadhus then leave.

This rite, performed by sadhus, considerably relieves the grief suffered by the relatives of the deceased and infuses spiritual fortitude.

Agni samskāra

The family members then take the body to the cremation pyre, all the while chanting Bhagwān's name. *Rāma bolo bhai Rāma* is the most commonly uttered phrase. In Bengal it is *Hari bol, Hari bol*. In the Swāminārāyan sampradāya the *Swāminārāyan dhun* is chanted. After laying the body on the pyre, ghee is poured over it and the fire kindled by the eldest or youngest son. If a son is unable to attend or if a woman is childless, she can perform *agni samskāra* of her husband. In the absence of his wife, the village head has the rite performed by his nearest relatives (Vishnu Purāna 5/34,

Belief in the Swāminārāyan Sampradāya

In the *Harilīlākalpataru* (7/21), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan says that on the deathbed of a devotee, he arrives to take the *Jiva – Akshar mukta* – to *Akshardhām*, his divine abode. Thousands of devotees have reported this at the time of death. Occasionally family members also witness this. Therefore the *Akshar mukta* is not alone at the time of death.

See the author's book *Karma and Reincarnation in Hinduism* (2009), pp. 82-85 for the NDE story of Heli Patel, a 7-year-old girl who died from anaphylactic shock by an antibiotic. She describes her visit to *Akshardhām*.



fire kindled in a crucible that leads the procession to the crematorium

BAPS sadhus performing the antyeshti rites of a devotee



sadhus perform puja of the deceased



followed by ārti



pradakshinā by sadhus, relatives and bhaktas



fire in a crucible leads the bier to the crematorium



bier of a rich merchant in a sitting position, south India (water colour; 1822)

Note the musicians leading the procession.

Antyeshti rites in sacred places in India



agni samskāras on Manikarnikā ghāt, Kāshi



agni samskāra on the banks of river Narmadā, Chānod



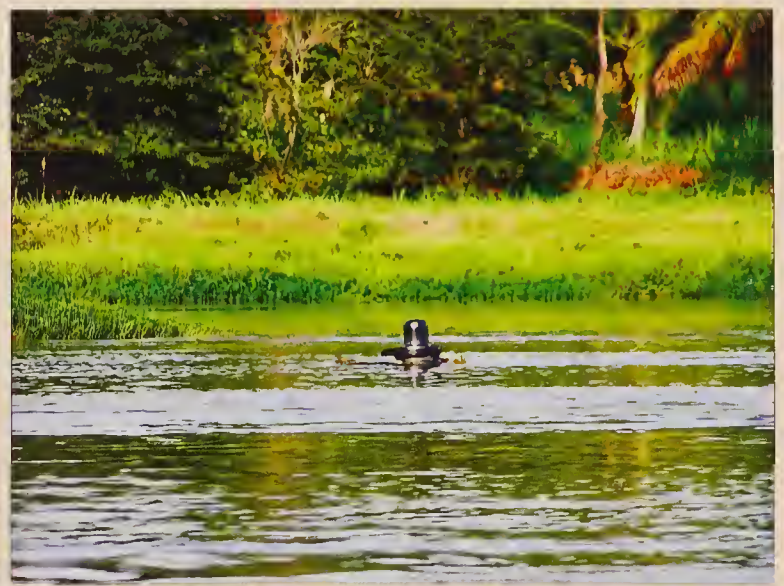
asthi puja rites, river Gondli, Gondal, Saurashtra



asthi visarjan in the Narmadā, Chānod



asthi visarjan in river Ghelā, Gadhadā, Saurashtra



sacred spot for asthi visarjan in south India at Triveni Sangam (confluence of 3 rivers); Kāveri, Hemāvati & Lokpāvani, at Srirangapatnam, Karnataka

Since the Tīrumālā hills in south India are regarded sacred, cremation of a dead body is not permitted there. Instead it is taken down to the plains.

Children's antyeshti samskāras:

The *Manu Smṛuti* (5/68,69) enjoins that, children who die before the age of two should be buried and not cremated. Cradled in the arms rather than tied in a *nanāmi*, they are taken to the outskirts of the village or town for burial.

Generally relatives of the deceased mourn at the loss of a relative. However in south India there is a unique custom. People believe and rightly so, that the deceased has been released from mundane suffering. As such it is an occasion of joy. Therefore it is customary to take the body to the crematorium in a richly decorated palanquin. While walking besides the *nanāmi*, relatives and friends joyously set alight fireworks, just as people do during marriage and other auspicious events and festivals.



BAPS sadhus cremating victims of the super cyclone in Orissa, 1999

Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa 30/19-24). Sesame seeds are also sprinkled onto the fire as a form of *pujā*. The latter two steps are obviously not possible where an electric kiln is used for cremation.

The fire lighted during *vivāh* was later, by tradition, taken to the house and kept kindled in an altar throughout life. This signified that married life was to be lived together through life's vicissitudes. When one of the spouse died, the *agni* was taken in a crucible or pot to the crematorium, where it was used to light the pyre. This symbolised the end of *vivāh* and the beginning of *agni samskāra*.

All those who participate in this rite then have a purificatory bath. The rites and observances which then follow vary in different social groups and *sampradāyas*.

In calamities

As a point of historical interest, when a large number of people died in a short duration, as in an epidemic, the *antyeshti samskāras* had to be altered. This stemmed from lack of firewood needed in huge quantities. Jim Corbett, the renowned hunter of man-eating tigers and leopards in the early 20th century, cites such an occurrence in his famous book, *Man-eaters of Kumaon*. An outbreak of cholera and 'war fever' in 1918 decimated inhabitants in the Himalayan foothills. During these epidemics, people placed a live coal in the mouth of the deceased. The coal symbolised *Agnideva* and the act ritually completed *agni samskāra*. The body was then cast from a mountain top into the valley below.

In the aftermath of the 26th January 2001 earthquake in Bhuj, BAPS sansthā's sadhus performed an *antyeshti yagna* twelve days later, on 7th February 2001, for all those who died. The yagna's sanctified water was then sprinkled on the sites where dead bodies remained buried under immovable rubble. This served as an alternative rite spiritually equal to cremation, ensuring the continued transmigration of the *jivātmās* (see photo on top of p.122).

By cremation, the body's five basic components – known as *panch bhuts* – *prithvi* (earth), *jal* (water), *tej* (fire), *vāyu* (wind) and *ākāśh* (space) are returned to those of the universe; the *Panch Mahābhuts*. This maintains the cosmic equilibrium. All *samskāras* are spiritually oriented. However some directly benefit the environment in one way or another.



Scientists in the past decade have begun to realise this. They have noted that, cremation for example, is the best, most effective and eco-friendly method of disposing the dead. Burial leads to enormous problems of space and groundwater contamination. Corpses infected with plague, the Ebola virus, slow-virus disease and infective cancers can infect vectors which directly feed on them. This ultimately affects humans. In the final decade of the 20th century, England and Europe realised the prudence of incinerating even diseased farm animals, especially those afflicted with mad cow disease (BSE) and foot and mouth disease.

Asthi sanchāyan

Sanchāyan means to collect. After cremation, the ashes and residual bones (*asthi* – also known as *ful* – flower) are collected in a pot. In some communities it is customary to wash them with milk or *panchgavya*¹ and then sanctified water. The pot is then taken to sacred rivers such as Gangā, Narmadā or the sacred confluence, *Triveni Sangam*², of three rivers: Gangā, Yamunā and Saraswati in Prayāg (Allahabad). BAPS followers sprinkle the ashes in the sacred river Ghelā, in Gadhadā and Gondali, in Gondal. During the ritual, a brahmin pundit utters Vedic mantras and performs the final rites for the moksha of the deceased. The ashes are then dispersed in the river, a ritual known as *asthi visarjan* (see photos p.317).

¹*panchgavya*: cow's milk, yogurt, ghee, urine and dung.

²There is also another sacred *Triveni Sangam* in Karnataka, south India, in Srirangapatnam, where people from everywhere disperse ashes. The three holy rivers of this sangam are Kāverī, Hemāvati & Lokpāvani (see photo on p.317).

Asthi visarjan in the UK

In northern England, Gateshead Council has designated part of Derwent River for British Hindus & Sikhs to disperse ashes.

(Source: IANS, Saturday 21st July, 2007)

Sutak (ashauch) impurity

This is a period of ten to thirteen days during which the nearest family members do not perform their personal daily, religious rituals such as *pujā*, *ārti* and *thāl*. Their personal *pujā* is given to a friend to perform on their behalf. The family members can visit the mandir for darshan. During this period, the *shāstras* enjoin:

*Swādhyāyam shrāvayetpitrye dharmashāstrāni chaiva hi
ākhyānitihāsānscha purānāni khilāni cha*

– Manu Smṛuti (3/232)

– during *shrāddh* karmas after death, one should recite and others should listen to dharma *shāstras*, divine episodes, *Itihās*, *Purāna kathās*, etc..

*Dānam pratigrahaṃ homam
swādhyāyancha nivartayet*

– the following are forbidden during *sutak*: to give or receive donation, *homa*, *swādhyāy*

– *Garud Purāna* (Uttarārdha 29/3)

pujan & pinda offerings



river Narmadā, Chānod



river Sābarmatī, Amdavad

On either the eleventh, twelveth or thirteenth day, the relatives offer *thāl* (food) to Paramātmā in the local mandir to repay *pitru* (ancestral) debt.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan also advocates:

Janmāshaucham mrutāshaucham swasambandhānusaratah |
pālaniyam yathāśhāstram chaturvarnyarjanairmam ||

– Shikshāpatrī 88

– the *sutak* samskāras should be observed as per prevailing times and one's capacity.

The general Hindu belief is that as soon as the *jiva* leaves the body, it adopts another body whose limbs grow day by day. On the tenth day after death, this 'interim' body grows completely. The son of the deceased offers *pindas* – food balls made from wheat flour and water – to the growing limbs, either day to day or all ten together on the tenth day. It is believed that the deceased still continues his relation with this world. Therefore the deceased is termed *Pret*, which means departed, but who has not yet reached the other world.

On the eleventh day, Brahmā, Vishnu, Rudra and Yama are invoked, with Vishnu as the special witness. In their presence the deceased is offered *pindas*. On the twelveth day the departed *jiva* is given away to the other world, where he then resides with his forefathers. As soon as he reaches the other world, he is released from his *pret* body.

The relatives are then freed from the *asaucha* (impurity) period. They can then perform their daily puja.



objects in the sajjā



sajjā rite performed in the mandir

These rites are also samskāras on the *ātmā* to lead it to Paramātmā.

An associated rite after cremation usually practised in India, is for the close male relatives of the deceased to shave their heads. This rite has died out among Hindus living abroad. Besides this, some communities have only simple meals for a fixed number of days during *sutak*.

Sajjā (shayyā)

In Gujarat the family members then perform the *sajjā* ritual. In this, they offer a brahmin: a cow, a cot, utensils, grains, a set of clothes and footwear and anything else that the deceased used or was fond of. The brahmin performs the ritual and accepts the *sajjādān* – the objects, symbolically to send them to the deceased for his use in the next world.

BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya believes that the *ātmā*, who is then termed *Akshar mukta*, is received by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami and Pramukh Swami Mahārāj (the present Gunātīt Satpurush) and taken to Akshardhām. Thus the redeemed *Akshar mukta* does not need any material offerings in Akshardhām.

However if it is a family or a community's tradition to perform the *sajjā*, this is done at the nearest mandir and the objects are offered to Paramātmā Himself.

Jivachcharyā

Another popular alternative is the *jivachcharyā*. It is the same as the *sajjā*, except it is performed by a person while he or she is alive – as the name implies. During this ritual the central sentiment uttered is, 'I am performing this ritual to



pujā and pradakshinā of a cow, performed as part of antyeshti samskāras on the 12th day.

Note: It is customary for female members of the family to wear white saris during the sutak period.



*bathing after agni samskāra,
river Narmadā, Chānod*

please Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and Pramukh Swami Mahārāj.’ The *jivachcharyā* imbues a feeling of contentment in the individual since he/she witnesses it.

A remarkable, yet slight variation of the *jivachcharyā*, was a phenomenon often practised by many exalted devotees during Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s period. One such instance concerned a healthy, aged female devotee named Mulima of Ganla, who had realised Paramātmā. One morning, she instructed her husband to return from the fields at midday, since Bhagwān Swāminārāyan would be arriving in divine form to take her to Akshardhām. Though astonished by such a request, since she was healthy, he nevertheless returned at noon. He saw her sitting cross-legged on the floor which was smeared with cow dung. She instructed him to perform the final *pujan* and *ārti*! Closing her eyes and uttering her final ‘*Jai Swāminārāyan*’ to him, she forsook her body!



*pilgrims embarking a boat to perform
pujan & pinda offerings on an islet in
the river Narmadā, Chānod*



Conclusion

In the past, the sixteen Hindu samskāras formed an integral part of Hindu life. Today, with the encroachment of modern living, especially among urban Hindus and NRI's, only a few of them have survived, namely *nāmakaran*, *chaul*, *upanayan*, *vivāh* and *antyeshti*. Yet these samskāras, with their spiritual import, holistically 'samskarise' all aspects of an individual's life. The samskāra rituals bring together family members, close relatives and friends, increasing the cohesion of the family and community. In turn this harmonises and strengthens the social structure. The consequence of this is a healthy society with a strong cultural identity, which successfully boosts and perpetuates its traditional beliefs, customs, morals and values. This has been one of the key reasons for Sanātan Dharma withstanding the rigours and onslaughts of foreign incursions and upheavals through the ages.

Through their direct experience with the Divine, the ancient rishis and sages enjoined the sixteen samskāras for the eternal benefit of mankind. They wove them as 'outward acts' into the fabric of daily life of the Hindu, from pre-birth to post-death 'for inward or spiritual grace'. Today, the pivotal samskāra which will determine the cohesion and perpetuation of Hindu traditions worldwide is *vivāh*, if observed sincerely with its pristine and lofty sentiments focused on *ātmā* and *Paramātmā*.

Antyeshti Samskāras of Ascetics

There are no antyeshti samskāras prescribed by the Dharma Shāstras for samnyāsis except leaving the body in a forest, cave or submerging in a sacred river.

However Vaishnava sadhus are cremated. In the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, a deceased sadhu is cremated by fellow sadhus. If the sadhu's former relatives are within reach, they are summoned for final darshan. After cremation, there is no ritual of collecting and dispersing the ashes. Nor is sutak necessary either by the sadhus or the former relatives.

The sadhu is bathed with panchāmrut and saffron water, adorned new saffron robes, kanthi and janoī. He is offered puja by imprinting chandan and kumkum on the forehead, and garlanded. His ārti is performed by sadhus and devotees. The sadhus then carry his nanāmi to do five pradakshinās of the mandir, simultaneously singing the 'Swāminārāyan dhun.' Devotees too consider it meritorious in lifting the nanāmi.

In the BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya, the places of birth and agni samskāra of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and the Gunātīt successors are regarded as sacred, to the extent of being revered as tirths. As such, a shrine is consecrated on each site, where the asthi too, are kept for veneration and worship by devotees.



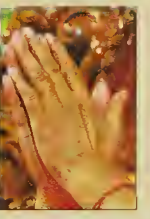
pinda offerings in the river Narmadā



31. Shrāddh (Offerings to ancestors)

- Shrāddh
- Types of shrāddh
- Offerings and rituals
- Sacred places for shrāddh

श्राद्ध



Shrāddh

Shrāddh is a ritual of offering food to please the *pitrus* (manes) and for their spiritual beneficence. Vasus, Rudras and Adityas are *devatās* and *pitrus* of *shrāddh* (Yājñavalkya Smṛuti I/269). They are gratified by the offerings, which they pass on to the *pitrus* wherever they may be. Respectively, the three deities represent the father (*pitā*), paternal grandfather (*pitāmah*) and paternal great grandfather (*prapitāmah*) (Manu Smṛuti 3/284).

The shāstras cite that the ritual of *shrāddh* originated with Vishnu during his Varāha (boar) avatār and that Vishnu dwells in the three *pinds* offered to the three aforementioned *pitrus* (Mahābhārat Shānti Parva 345/14-21, Vishnudharmottar I/139/14-16).

Belief

The act of offering food balls to the three ancestors necessarily requires that, in an ethereal body they are still able to enjoy the *tanmātrā* – essence – of the balls, years after demise. The *pitrus* being pleased, then bestow on their living descendants, children, health, wealth, longevity, knowledge, prosperity, moksha and *swarg* (Agni Purāna 163/41-42, Padma Purāna, Srushtikhand 34/217-218).

A question then arises, of how food offered to a brahmin is availed of by the departed manes (*jivātmās*)?

Vedic mantras chanted with faith convey the offerings made to the *pitrus*:

shraddhayā diyate yātrā tachchrāddham parikirtitam

– Marichi in Chandrodāya (Nirnaysindhu III, p.372)

– that which is offered with faith is called *shrāddh*.

It is believed that the *jivātmā* of a deceased does not leave the vicinity of his house for twelve days (Matsya Purāna 18/5-7). After cremation, the *jivātmā* attains a *vāyavya* body. Prayer is offered to Agnideva – the deity of fire, to take the *jivātmā* to Vishnu (Rig Veda X/15/3). In the world of *pitrus*,



mātru shrāddh rites performed at Bindu Sarovar, Siddhpur, north Gujarat

opp. page: shrāddh rites on the banks of the Narmadā, Chānod, south Gujarat

the departed *ātmā* enjoys food offered in *shrāddh* with the utterance of the word *svadhā* (Vishnudharmasutra 20.34-36).

The Kurma Purāna states that on *Amās*, the darkest and moonless day of the Hindu lunar month, *pitrus* assume the *vayavya* body and arrive at the doorstep of their homes. Here they long to see whether their descendants are offering *shrāddh*. They remain till sunset. If nothing is offered, then hungry and thirsty, they depart solemnly. *Shrāddhā* (faith), from which the word *shrāddh* is derived, is the most important factor of *shrāddh* (Skand Purāna VI.218.3). One entertains firm faith that, what is given to the brahmin for the *pitrus* will reach them. And the *pitrus* are appeased only with *shrāddh* offered through a brahmin (Skand Purāna, Nagar, 221/47).

Types of shrāddh

There are four main types:

- 1 *Sapindikaran* – performed after the *antyeshti* samskāras, to propitiate father, grandfather and great grandfather.
- 2 *Ekodishta* – performed once a year on the death *tithi* of the parents. Swāminārāyan followers observe this by offering food to Bhagwān at their chosen *shikharbaddh* mandir.
- 3 *Pārvanshrāddh* – performed on an auspicious day or festival, for fulfilling mundane desires.
- 4 *Vruddhishrāddh* – performed during a *yagna*, *vivāh*, *murti pratishthā*, *yagnopavit*, *samāvartan*, *garbhādhān*, *pumsavan*, *simant*, *jatkarma* and at *samnyās dikshā*.

Of the above, the most meritorious is one in which one's *Ishtadev* is offered food everyday. The shāstras stipulate that the family from which a person has become a sadhu, has performed all *shrāddh*. This is because his whole life is spent in bhakti and *paropkār* (for the good of others). One hundred and one generations of such a person are uplifted (Vachanāmrut Gadhadā I-75).

Time

The dark half – *Krishna paksh* of Bhādarvā is considered appropriate for *pitru shrāddh*, when the sun is in the middle of *dakshināyan*, in the *Kanyā rāshi* (Virgo).



Sapindikaran shrāddh offerings, Chānod



offerings to pitrus, who arrive as crows, during shrāddh paksha (dark fortnight of Bhādrapad)

However whether the day is appropriate for *shrāddh* or not, when a pilgrim reaches a *tirth*, he should always bathe and perform *tarpan* and *shrāddh* (Padma Purāna, Srishtikhand 34/218-219).

Twelve days after the period of impurity of death, on the 13th, *shayyādān* is performed. In this, fruits, clothes and a Kapilā cow (brown coloured) are given to a brahmin or a mandir (see photo p.320).

Bhadarvā vad 13 is considered especially auspicious for *pitru shrāddh*. In Gayā and other holy places, any *tithi* is considered auspicious except 14th. For a person who has died by a weapon or injury, *Shurāpurā shrāddh* is performed on the 14th.

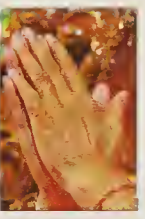
During Bhadarvā vad, known as *shrāddh paksh*, BAPS Swāminārāyan sansthā observes *shrāddh* as a form of bhakti, rather than mourning, of: Bhagwān Swāminārāyan and Bhaktimātā on vad 10, Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami and Bhagatji Mahārāj on vad 13, Shāstriji Mahārāj on vad 4 and Yogiji Mahārāj on vad 12.

Householders of BAPS annually observe *shrāddh* (*Ekodishṭa* cited above) of their parents, by donating money to the *shikharbaddh* mandir of their choice. From this *dān*, food is offered to Thākorji, on the *tithis* of the parents' demise. The family members then partake of this *prasād*.

Offerings and rituals

The *pind* balls are made of eight items – *ashtāngani pindam uchyate* – milk, yogurt, ghee, flour (rice or barley), sesame, flower, *aushadhi* (herb) and chandan. To bind the food balls, water of *darbha* grass (*darbhodak*) is used. Usually *pinds* (balls) of cooked rice flour are offered to three brahmins. The three represent the three ancestors described above in *sapindikaran shrāddh*. Lentils, wheat, barley, sesame, milk, ghee and *dān* of wealth earned lawfully, also please the *pitrus* for a long period. *Khir* – a sweet of rice cooked in milk, is also an important offering. Those who are poor may offer *shāk shrāddh* – just vegetables. If unable to afford this, they may offer grass to a cow. If still more destitute, a person may just raise his hands high, in supplication to the *pitrus* and offer prayerful sentiments.

Bhojan (proper meal) as a *shrāddh* rite should be offered to the following ten people: *nānā*, maternal uncle, *bhanej*, guru, father-in-law, grandson, son-in-law, friend, *ritvij* pundit and the pundit officiating the *yagna* (Manu Smruti 3/48).

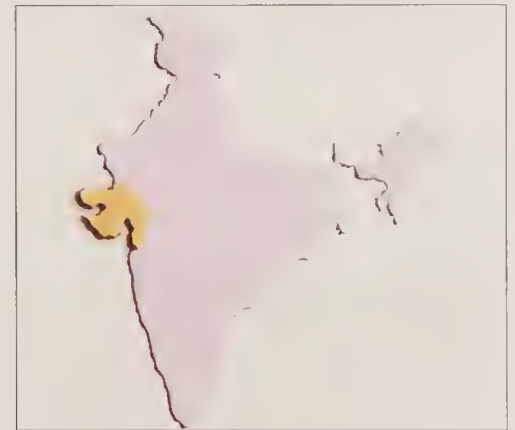


In the Sri Janārdana Swamy mandir, Varkalā, Kerala, rice balls from the mandir are offered to the manes everyday. This ritual is known as Kshetra Pinda Shradhom.

– Bayi 1998:166



Sri Rāmachandra Bhagwān performed shrāddh of his father, King Dashrath, in Pushkar sarovar (Rajasthan).



Sacred places for shrāddh

There are five *tirths* for *shrāddh*, named after the parts of the human body: Gayā, Nābhigayā, Padgayā, Kāpalgayā and Mātrugayā.

(1) Gayā, near Patna in Bihar (eastern India) is considered a *pitru tirth*. An *asur* (demon) named Gayā, performed austerities to please Brahmā. He then offered his body on which Vishnu could perform a yagna. This place then became known as Gayā. Named after this event, there is a Vishnupad mandir here.

(2) Nābhigayā is today's Jojpur in Orissa (eastern India). Here there is a mandir of Varāh, Vishnu's third avatār. *Nābhi* means navel. Pilgrims perform *shrāddh* after bathing in the nearby river.

(3) Padgayā, also known as *Pad tirth* (*pad* means feet/legs), is today's Pithapuram, Andhra Pradesh. It is located near the river Pampa, and is an important *tirth* for people in south India.

(4) Kāpalgayā. *Kapāl* means forehead. This *tirth* is located near Badrināth, on the banks of the Alaknandā. Here there are hot water *kunds*. Nearby, there is a large *shilā* (rock) named *Kapāl*. Hence this *tirth* is also known as Brahmakapal and *Kapālmochantirth*. The above four are *pitru tirths*, where *shrāddh* of fathers is performed. The fifth is the only *mātrutirth*, in India.

(5) Mātrugayā. This is located at Siddhpur, north Gujarat. The actual *tirth*, also known as Shristhal, is Bindu Sarovar, a pond on the banks of the old river Saraswati. *Bindu* means drop. The pond (*sarovar*) formed from the tear drops which fell here from Vishnu's eyes. He was pleased by Kardam rishi's austerities. He then granted the rishi a boon to be born as his son. Some time later, Bhagwān Manu arrived on a *tirth yātrā* at Shristhal. Pleased with Kardam rishi's austerities, he gave his daughter Devahuti, in marriage to him. Vishnu's boon then led to Kapildeva Bhagwān's birth, who later propounded Sāmkhya philosophy. After his mother's demise, Kapildeva Bhagwān performed her *shrāddh* rites here. Bhagwān Parshuram too, performed his mother Renuka's *shrāddh* here. Since then people have performed *mātru shrāddh* at Bindu Sarovar. These include *āchāryas* such as Shankar, Madhva, Rāmānuj and Vallabh.



Vishnupad mandir, Gayā (Bihar)

Gokarna performed *shrāddh* of his evil brother Dhundhukāri at Gayā.

– Bhāgvata Mahātmya 5/19



pilgrims from south India performing
matru shrāddh at Bindu Sarovar,
Siddhpur, north Gujarat

It is reported that only at Bindu Sarovar do *pitrus* enter their relative and actually voice the type of food they desire.

The fruits of *shrāddh* are considered indestructible (*akshay*) if performed in: Gayā, Prayāg, Prabhās, Pushkar, Kāshi, Gangā, Yamunā and Narmadā (Shankhsmruti 14.27-29). *Shrāddh* is to be performed in a pure area, facing south, smeared with cow dung. ‘Pure’ areas include holy places, deva mandirs, banks of rivers, mountains and forests, which do not belong to a person (Brahma Purāna 220.5-7, Kurma Purāna, Uttar 22/16-17).

Financial constraints and proximity of sacred places nearer home, often induce people to choose these, in preference to those in distant places. For example, people in Saurashtra and north Gujarat often perform *shrāddh* on the seashore at Somnāth. Some choose Vauthā, a place near Dholka, situated on the confluence of seven rivers. Those living south of Amdavad perform *shrāddh* in Chānod, on the banks of the Narmadā. People in Madhya Pradesh prefer the holy river Shipra at Ujjain.

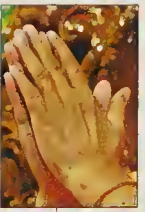
In the BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan sampradāya, devotees perform *shrāddh* in the nearest *shikharbaddh* mandir.

When a parent of a BAPS sadhu passes away, he does not have to observe *sutak* nor perform any *shrāddh* rites, except have a ritual purificatory bath.

FAQ

Why should *shrāddh* be performed?

Besides being an injunction of the seers, *shrāddh* is performed to repay the debt of parents and forefathers, while nurturing children till they grow up. *Shrāddh* relieves the offspring of their obligations. Secondly it is an occasion to remember them. Thirdly their blessings endow virtues, as well as conferring many other benefits. Sanātan Dharma firmly believes that a person’s life on earth is not only lived as a result of his past and present karmas, but also aided by the blessings of *devas* and his *pitrus*.



P – Patna,
G – Gayā, B – Bodhgayā

James Forbes, a colonial visitor who lived near Chānod for four years, observed in his *Oriental Memoirs*, in 1781, ‘No place in the Western Provinces of Hindostan is reputed so holy as Chandode; none at least exceed it; its temples and seminaries almost vie with the fanes of Jaggernaut and colleges of Benares’ (1988 III:6).



When the Phalgu Gangā dries up, in Gayā, pilgrims perform *shrāddh* rites by offering food balls in holes dug in the river bed



32. Vrat-Upavās (Vows and fasts)

- Seasons
- Stellar events
- Avatārs & Deities
- Origin of Ekādashi
- Glory of Ekādashi
- Ekādashi rituals in Vaishnava tirths
- Ekādashi rituals in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya
- Effects of fasting
- Vrat-Upavās in BAPS
- Importance of fasting
- Breaking a fast (pārnā)
- Upavās in vrats, utsavs and prāyashchitta
- Jāgran enjoined during vrats
- Maun vrat (silence)

The shāstras consider the human body as the only means to observe dharma; *shariramādya khalu dharma sādhanam*, and to perform sādhanā for moksha. For this the seers stipulated certain codes of conduct such as *vrat* and *upavās* to maintain its physical, mental and spiritual health.

A *vrat* is a vow of self-denial, usually, though not always, involving fasting and often night vigils (*jāgran*) advocated by the shāstras or tradition.

Upavās means fasting. *Upavās* has a deeper meaning than just abstaining food and drink. The Bhavishya Purāna (64/4) defines *upavās*:

*Upāvruttasya pāpebhyo yastu vāso gunaihi saha
upavāsah sa vigneayah sarvabhogavivirjitaha.*

– *upavās* is forsaking all sins, introspecting, imbibing virtues and forsaking the cravings of all the senses.

Bādhā (बाधा) is a self-chosen form of self-denial in which a person decides to avoid a certain type of food such as salt, milk, sweets, observes *ektānā* or other fasts such as *farār*, *dhārṇā-pārnā* etc., until a certain project or wish is fulfilled. The seers assigned certain *tithis* (days) and months as holy which rendered them an *ādhyātmic* (spiritual) significance. They then advocated observing some form of self denial and fasting during these periods. In the Smritis they also prescribe fasts as *prāyashchitta* – atonement – for a lapse in observing certain vows or codes of conduct.



व्रत-उपवास

Rather than feasting and physical merriment, fasting and vrats are unique and important forms of sādhanā in Sanātan Dharma.



*wheat grass shoots grown by girls
for Gauri puja*

opp. page: young girls celebrating Gauri vrat for five days in the sacred Shravan month. They fast by having one cooked meal at night and only dried fruits during the day

The *ādhyātma* was either based on the seasons, astronomical events or related to avatārs or deities.

Seasons

Regarding seasons, consider the onset of the monsoon in June-July. The increased humidity has two effects. Water logging and dampness induces pestilence in certain crops and vegetables. Secondly, the digestive fire of humans decreases, aggravating *vāta* (wind):

|| *varshāsvagnibale kshine kupyanti pavanādayah.* ||

– Charak Samhitā (Sutrasthān 6/34)

Therefore to maintain health and prevent disease, the rishis, including those of Ayurveda, advocated various forms of fasting to decrease food intake and avoid those foods prone to pestilence and those which aggravated *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha*.

After the rains ceased, during the Sharad season in September-October, heat radiating off the wet earth increased humidity. This vitiated *pitta* (choler) in the body (Charak, Sutrasthān 6/41). Ayurvedic texts then enjoined foods such as rice cooked in milk (*khir*) or parched rice (*paunwā*) and milk, which nullifies *pitta*.

The seers incorporated this observance in the *shrāddh* rituals, during the second half of Bhādarvā (Bhādrapad) (see Ch.31). This involved milk and rice offerings to please the *pitrus* – the departed ancestors.

After Bhādarvā, during the first nine days of Aso, known as *Navrātri* (*Nortā*), women observe various forms of fasting to please *Shakti Mātā* – mother goddesses such as Pārvati, Ambā or Durga. Some take only water. Others eat one meal a day (*ektānā*). Another *Navrātri* more commonly celebrated in northern India, occurs from Chaitra *sud* 1 (Gudi Padavo) to Chaitra *sud* 9 – the day of Shri Rāma's incarnation. Followers of the Ramanandi Sampradāy observe a nine-day fast, only on water.

During such periods of fasting, people often also observe *jāgran* – staying awake at nights, listening to or reciting sacred texts or singing bhajans.

Stellar events

People also observe *vrats* and *upavās* during stellar events such as full moon (*Punam*), eclipse (*grahan*) and the

In Kerala, the lunar month of Vaishakha (April-May from the new moon of Metam), is considered especially auspicious. This is reflected in the saying, 'There is no yuga like Kali, no truth like the Gangā and no vrata like Vaishakha.' The Vaishakha vrata and other austerities are observed to please Shri Vishnu.

intercalary month *Adhik* or *Purushottam Mās*, which occurs every 2.5 years in the Indian lunar-based calendar.

On Punam, the effect of the full moon in increasing the ocean tides, is well known. A similar effect occurs in the human body, which is 80% water. To decrease the moon's detrimental effect on the body and mind, many people fast on Punam.

During eclipses, harmful radiation reaches earth, which has a bad effect on digestion. Hence for healthy people, the *shāstras* advocate fasting for a fixed period, calculated prior to and during the eclipse by astrologers. Researchers have noted that certain radiations during eclipses do harm the body. Out of their insight, the seers, declared that they also affect the mind. Hence they enjoined people to suspend all activities and spend the time reciting *mantras*, chanting *nām japa* or singing *bhajans* (see Ch.19).

As for *Adhik mās*, the rishis assigned it the greatest sacredness, more than the usual *Shrāvan*, the second month of the monsoon. During *Adhik mās*, Vishnu himself decreed that any religious observance would bear greater merit. Therefore people specially plan and hold *kathā* and *pārāyan* (see Ch.11), observe extra *vrats* such as *ektānā* and embark on pilgrimages to gain extra spiritual merit (*punya*).

Avatārs & Deities

An important lunar *tithi* is the 11th of every fortnight. This has an *ādhyātmic* basis, in which Bhagwān Vishnu granted a boon to a damsel, for people to avoid physical food, as well as 'food' of all the *ekādash* – eleven – *indriyas* (technically; ten senses of action and perception and the mind as eleventh) (see *Ekādashi* on p.335).

With two *Ekādashis* a month, there occur 24 in a year. Each has a name and a story of its origin and significance. Four of these are most sacred; Bhima, Deva Shayani, Jal Zilani (*Pārshva Parivartini*) and Deva Prabodhini.

The more devout may fast once a week, voluntarily observing extra *vrats* on other *tithis*, such as *Punam*, *amās* (final day of the month), and certain self-chosen days of the week. Devotees of Shiva, Rāma and Krishna observe fasts on *Mahā Shivrātri*, *Rāma Navmi* and *Janmāshtami*, respectively.

*Raverindoshchoparāge
jāyamāne - parāhā kriyāhā,
hītwāshu shuchibhihi sarvaihi
kāryāhā Krishnamanorjapaha.*



– during the solar and lunar eclipses, devotees should suspend all their usual activities and chant Bhagwān's name or mantra.

– Bhagwān Swāminārāyan
(*Shikshāpatri* 86)



women performing *pujā* ritual during
Adhik mās (intercalary month)

24 Ekādashis in a year

Month	Name of Ekādashi
1. Kārtik sud	Deva Prabodhini
2. Kārtik vad	Utpati (Smārt)
3. Magshar sud	Mokshadā
4. Magshar vad	Safalā
5. Posh sud	Putradā
6. Posh vad	Shatilā
7. Mahā sud	Jayā
8. Mahā vad	Vijayā
9. Fāgan sud	Āmalaki
10. Fāgan vad	Pāpmochani
11. Chaitra sud	Kāmadā
12. Chaitra vad	Varuthini
13. Vaishakh sud	Mohini
14. Vaishakh vad	Aparā
15. Jeth sud	Bhima
16. Jeth vad	Yogini
17. Ashaadh sud	Deva Shayani
18. Ashaadh vad	Kāmikā
19. Shravan sud	Pavitṛā
20. Shravan vad	Ajā
21. Bhadarva sud	Jal Zilani (<i>Pārshva Parivartini</i>)
22. Bhadarva vad	Indirā
23. Aso sud	Pāsānkush
24. Aso vad	Ramā

- farār* – eating *farāri* foods
(see glossary).
- ektānā* – one meal a day.
- dhārnā-pārnā* – fasting on alternate
days for one month
or even *Chaturmas*.
- chāndrāyan* – fasts in which food
balls are eaten,
whose number
coincides with lunar
waxing and waning.



women performing puja of the *Vad*
(banyan tree) during *Vat Sāvitrī* vrat,
Maharashtra

Swāminārāyan followers observe a waterless fast on the latter two and on important Ekādashis. On Mahā Shivrātri and Vāman Jayanti, they observe *farār* (see details of *farāri* foods on p.431). In the Shikshāpatrī (76-78) Bhagwān Swāminārāyan also enjoins followers to observe extra fasting vows during *Chāturmas* or Shrāvan. In the latter, *ektānā* is commonly observed. Many also observe *dhārnā-pārnā* and *chāndrāyan*; some for four months.

Compared to men, young girls and women observe more *vrats* and with greater devotion. This attests to their greater fervour and faith. Many of these *vrats* were originally performed by *satis* or *devis* such as Pārvati to please Shiva (*Gauri vrat*), for *akhand saubhāgya* (eternal good fortune concerning the longevity of their husbands).

During *Vat Sāvitrī* vrat from Jeth sud 13 to 15 (Punam), women perform puja of the *Vad* (banyan tree) or *peepal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*), which symbolically represent Vishnu. The *vrat* involves a fast, with only fruit eaten on the first two days and only water on the third. While performing *pradakshinā* of the tree trunk, they tie a cotton string around it (see photo above). The sentiment underlying this *vrat* is that a woman prays for the health and longevity of her husband and children and not to be widowed. Women devotionally recite or listen to the *kathā* of Satyavan and Sāvitrī. By her chastity and earnest prayer to Yama Rājā, the king of hell, she returned her husband, Satyavan from *Yamadwār* (death).



Sati Sāvitrī protecting her
husband Satyavan from Yama Rājā
(Source: Rishis, Mystics & Heroes
of India © 2006, Swāminārāyan
Aksharpith, Amdavad).



Origin of Ekādashi

In Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā II-8. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan relates the story of Ekādashi.

Once Bhagwān Nārāyan was resting. A demon named Murdanav arrived and challenged Him to a duel. Suddenly a damsel appeared out of Bhagwān's *Ekādash indriyas*¹. Murdanav was so attracted to this damsel that he asked her to marry him. The damsel agreed, but only if he agreed to a duel with her, 'Whoever shall defeat me shall marry me.' Blinded by passion, he fought with her. The damsel killed him. Pleased with her, Bhagwān Nārāyan granted her a boon. She asked, 'O Prabhu! As I manifested from your *Ekādash indriyas*, let my name be Ekādashi. I am wedded to *tapas* and I desire that people should observe the Ekādashi *vrat* (fast) and control their *Ekādash indriyas* on this day. Bhagwān Nārāyan agreed. Ever since, Hindus fast on the eleventh day of *sud* (*shukla*) *paksha* and *vad* *paksha* of the month.

¹*Ekādash indriyas* – 11 senses see p.333

Of the 24 Ekādashis in a year, some are of special significance in different shrines in India:

Pandharpur (Maharashtra) – Āshādh & Kārtik sud Ekādashis

Srivangam (Tamil Nadu) – Vaikunta Ekādashi

Guruvāyur (Kerala) – Vrischika sud Ekādashi. Here it is also believed that on this Ekādashi, Shri Krishna revealed the Gītā to Arjuna.

Furthermore, on this day, the child Shri Krishna performed the Govardhana Yāga (pujā), instead of the usual Indra Yāga.



The ideal Ekādashi

In Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā I-38, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan has elaborated that a true Ekādashi is when one withdraws the ten *indriyas* and the eleventh the mind, from their worldly ‘foods’ and focuses them on Bhagwān and devotional activities. So moderation in daily leisure activities is also desirable.

Glory (mahimā) of Ekādashi

Sanātan Dharma’s shāstras extol immense glory of Ekādashi:

‘Just by uttering or hearing the word ‘Ekādashi’, *Yamdut* (attendants of Yama Rājā – king of hell) are frightened. If one keeps awake on the night of Ekādashi and if puṇjā of Bhagwān is performed with tulsi leaves, then a person attains the *punya* of one crore (ten million) *yagnas*.’

– Padma Purāna (Brahmakhand 15/2-4)

‘If the whole earth is placed as *dān* on one pan of a weighing scale, and the Ekādashi fast on the other, then the fast is greater than donating the earth.’

– Garud Purāna (1/127/12)

‘The fruit of one sixteenth part of an Ekādashi is greater than the merit from 1000 *Ashwamedh yagnas* and 100 *Rājsuya yagnas*.’

– Unnamed text

‘The *punya* from the *dān* of one crore (10 million) cows is less than one sixteenth part of the fruit of one Ekādashi.’

– Brahmānand Swami

(Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s poet paramhansa).

‘Shāstriji Mahārāj often said, ‘One who observes one Ekādashi receives the *punya* equivalent to offering food to 60,000 *tapasvis* (ascetics performing austerities) for one year’.

– Yogiji Mahārāj’s *Divyavani* p.250

Ekādashi rituals in Vaishnava tirths

Pandharpur (Maharashtra) – Āshādh & Kārtik *sud* Ekādashis. Thousands of devotees perform a pilgrimage on foot to Pandharpur.

Tirumālā – Of special importance are Kaushika Ekādashi (Kārtik *sud* 11) and Vaikunta (*Mukkoti*) Ekādashi during the month of Pushya. In the latter, the *utsav murti* is adorned with *vajrakavach* (metallic) decoration and is taken in a procession in the *Mukkoti pradakshinām*. This is a corridor behind the *garbha gruha*, which opens only on this day of the year.

In the *Gītā* (6/17), Shri Krishna declares that only one who has control over food (*āhār*) and his other activities (*vihār*), masters *Yog*. Along with *bhakti* and *sharanāgati*, an aspirant then realises *Paramātmā*.

Jagannāth Puri – This is the only Vaishnava tirth in which Ekādashi is not observed. The Ekādashi Devi is symbolically tied by a chain to a pillar. Therefore people who happen to visit Puri on this day can eat all foods.

Srirangam – Vaikunta Ekādasi. This is the most important Ekādashi and festival in Sri Ranganātha's mandir. The festival lasts 20 days. The first ten are celebrated as *Pagal Pathu*. The next ten are *Era Pathu*. The commencing day of *Era Pathu* is Vaikunta Ekādasi. Bhagwān Ranganātha is adorned with magnificent garments and rubies. In a procession, he enters through the 'gate of heaven', the Paramapada Vasal. In the thousand-pillared hall, followers sing bhajans continuously from the Nalayira Divya Prabandham – the Tamil Veda, observe a fast and *jāgran* through the night (Aruniappan 2002:27).



naukā vihār (boat ride) in Ranchhodrājī's mandir, Dākor

Bhagwān Ranganātha carried during a procession on Vaikunta Ekadasi, Srirangam, Tamil Nadu



The Siveli (procession) around the mandir, with the utsav murtis on elephants, is conducted three times a day during Vṛischika sud Ekādashi in Guruvāyur (Kerala).

Ekādashi rituals in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

every Ekādashi



singing traditional bhajans in the shanagār or sandhyā ārti

Pavitrā Ekādashi, Shrāvan sud 11



exquisite adornments of pavitrā (silk balls) offered to Bhagwān

Jal Zilani Ekādashi (Pārshva Parivartini Ekādashi), Bhādarvā sud 11



grand shobhā yātrā of Thākorji & Ganeshji around the mandir



mahāpujā & naukā vihār (boat ride)

Devaprabodhini Ekādashi, Kārtik sud 11



Ganesh visarjan after naukā vihār



offering vegetable hātadi



Effects of fasting

This occurs on three levels – physical, mental and spiritual (on the *ātmā*).

The physical effects have been thoroughly documented by Western researchers. When the digestive system is given a rest, the body directs its energy to rid toxins clogged in the channels and cells. In Ayurveda these ‘toxins’ are known as *doshas* – of *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha*. In short, the body rejuvenates itself by expelling such effete material. This eradicates lethargy, dullness and incoherent thinking. This re-establishes an equilibrium of the three humours, a state known as *nirām*. A rested digestive system also means a boosted digestive fire (*vaishvānar agni* of the Gitā 15/14 and Ayurveda’s *jathar agni*); a vital factor for maintaining health. In the Charak Samhitā, Charak rishi states, ‘the digestive fire is the cause of longevity, complexion, strength, poise, joy, sustenance, aura, lustre, vitality, fires (5 *bhut agnis*, 7 *dhātu agnis*) and 5 *prānas*.... Therefore by ritual control & use of fuel in the form of conducive food, the digestive fire should be safeguarded’ (Chikitsāsthān 15/3,39).

Collectively, in addition to the physical effects, fasting invigorates *prānic* energy and improves mental thought and clarity the mind. It heightens consciousness, sense of perception and concentration. This aids all forms of spiritual *sāadhanā*. In this manner fasting benefits the *ātmā*.

The greatest effect of *vrats* and *upavās* is to strengthen the *ātmā*. It (re) gains strength to control all the eleven senses (*indriyas*). The key to this, according to seers, is that controlling and avoiding food regularly, gradually subdues *rasnā* (sense of taste) – the master *indriya* which is the gateway to all the other *indriyas*. An individual who has control over *rasnā* quickly realises that food (*anna*) is only a means to sustain the body, and not the goal. He eats to live rather than living to eat. Once the *ātmā* begins to realise its latent power, it can strive faster and rigorously perform higher spiritual *sāadhanā*. The greater the *sāadhanā*, the greater it realises its strength, which it directs towards realising Bhagwān and attaining moksha.

*Vrat-Upavās in BAPS
Swāminārāyan sansthā*

• *farār*, *ektānā*, *dhārnā-pārnā* & *chāndrāyan* (see margin on p.334).

• ‘Bhagatji vrat.’ Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s second spiritual successor was a householder, named Bhagatji Mahārāj. One of the vrats he performed to please his guru, Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami, was to fast for two days and have only one meal on the third day. He observed this vrat for 3.5 years! Technically this vrat is known as *dharna-dharna-parna*. Today many BAPS devotees observe Bhagatji vrat during Shravan or Chaturmas.

• Since the past ten years, devotees have begun to observe a fast of ‘x’ hours as an ‘austerity prayer’ to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan for Pramukh Swami Mahārāj’s good health. ‘X’ is the number of hours coinciding with his age. e.g. during his 84th year devotees fasted for 84 hours. This means a total abstinence of food and water for 84 hours.

• The BAPS record for *dhārnā-pārnā* is a devotee named Anil Patel in New Jersey, who has been observing this vrat continuously since 1997, without any ill effects and maintaining a constant, healthy weight!

• Shāstriji Mahārāj observed *nirjalā* (waterless) *Ekādashi* till the age of 75.

Breaking a fast (pāruā):

Regular fasting produces immense mental strength and clarity. These benefits continue as long as control is observed while breaking the fast; to prevent vomiting, indigestion and cramping. First a glass of ambient lemon juice with ginger should be sipped slowly. About two or more hours later, a light meal of mung or khichdi would be preferable. The tendency to gorge should be curbed, for the Gītā stipulates that one who observes moderation in diet and activity attains Yog – rapport with Paramātmā (6/17). Bhagwān Swāminārāyan also advocates a decrease in food intake especially during youthhood when the boosted passions need calming.

Vachanāmṛut Loyā 8

Importance of fasting

Fasting is an important injunction in Sanātan Dharma as a form of sādhanā.

Foremost, it is an endeavour for self-control (*samyam*). Since the sense of taste (*rasnā indriya*) is the gateway to all the other nine *indriyas*, fasting is a potent and effective method of subjugating *rasna*. When *rasna* is conquered, the other nine also lose their vigour. By controlling food intake, a person has more time and energy to delve upon spiritual sādhanā.

Since ancient times, yogis and mystics have performed sādhanā in which food intake is minimum while spiritual endeavours are maximum. The less the food, the more efficient the sādhanā and the greater the longevity.

Upavās in vrats, utsavs and prāyashchitta

The purpose of all *vrats* (acts of self-denial) and *utsavs* (festivals) is to offer bhakti and please the deity, to earn his/her grace. These include *utsavs* such as Mahā Shivaratri, Rāmanavmi, Swāminārāyan Jayanti, Krishna Janmāshtami, all Ekādashis (see Ch.13) and Purnimā, Shrāvan *mās*, Vāman *dwādashī*, the nine days of *Navrātri* (*Nortā*), eclipses and Purushottam (Adhik) *mās*.

Upavās as *prāyashchitta* is a means to atone for a sinful act or an inadvertent mistake while performing an important devotional ritual. It is for self-purification and again, to earn the Ishtadeva's grace. Such fasting of *prāyashchitta* lightens an aspirant's burden of guilt or sin and spurs him on the path of sādhanā with renewed zeal.

Jāgran enjoined during vrats

Jāgran means night vigil; staying awake at night, listening to *kathā* or singing bhajans. The Dharmashastras enjoin *jāgran* on Ekādashi, Mahā Shivaratri, Rāmanavmi and Krishna Janmāshtami. Along with fasting, the whole day of an *utsav* is to be spent in offering bhakti. Sleeping during the day destroys the *punya* of a fast. In some *vrats* such as Ekādashi and Janmāshtami, people stay awake till midnight. In the latter, Shri Krishna incarnated at midnight on Shrāvan *vad* 8. Devotees listen to the recitals of his divine *līlā* from the Bhāgavatam or *kathā* of the Gītā until midnight, when his *ārṭi* is performed and *annakut* offered. In other *utsavs*, devotees stay awake till 5 am.



Spending the night in such a manner earns greater *punya*. All the senses are occupied in devotional pursuits. *Jāgran* by watching T.V., videos, playing games or just chatting about mundane matters, is meaningless and fruitless. The *indriyas* run riot. Instead of controlling them, they are given a free reign. This leads to spiritual downfall.

Above all, one's *Ishtadeva* is pleased when devotees stay awake on the day of his incarnation once a year, to extol his glory.

Maun vrat (vow of silence)

Maun means silence. *Maun vrat* is a vow of silence, often observed by ascetics and lay people during certain periods of the year. Some ascetics observe it as *sāadhanā* for years.

Observing *maun* conserves mental and physical energy. The mind becomes easier to control. One is able to introspect deeply about one's thoughts, desires and *swabhāvas*. This is known as *antardrushti* – literally 'to look within'.

This helps in achieving self-control and so *maun* also helps in developing a person's overall character and spirituality. The *Gītā* (17/16) echoes this:

Pramukh Swami Mahārāj gives an innovative interpretation of maun; to extol Bhagwān's glory (by kathā or bhajan) is maun. In other words one should remain silent on māyic matters.

॥ *Manah prasādah saumyatvam maunamātmanaviṅgrah*
bhāvasamshuddhirityaitattapo mānasamucchyate ॥

– contentment of the mind, amiable temperament, silence, self control and purity of thoughts, is known as austerity of the mind.

Maun in daily activities

The Panchrātra Agam texts advocate silence – *maunam* during six daily activities:

॥ *Pujākāle jape home malotsarge visheshatah*
Snānabhojanakāle cha maunam satsu vidheeyate ॥

– silence should be observed during *pujā*, mantra recitation, offering oblations in the sacred fire, attending the call of nature, bathing and eating (Agama-Kosha 1992 VII: 23).





33. Āhār Shuddhi (Diet purity)

आहार शुद्धि

- Ideals of diet purity in the Upanishads
- Ahimsā (non-violence)
- Pāp karma (sin)
- Tāmasic diet
- Rājasic diet
- Sāttvic diet
- Four types of doshas
- Diet purity in the kitchen
- Diet purity in the home shrine
- Personal diet purity
- Diet purity relative to time and seasons

Ideals of diet purity in the Upanishads

The modern world has highly influenced the current concern about our daily allowances of proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals and trace elements. It has taught us to be obsessed about free radicals, salt, sugar, cholesterol, preservatives and additives. Researchers also introduced genetically modified (GM) crops, which have increased risks of cancer-causing factors. All these issues focus only on one factor – the physical body. Yet what about the mind? We are familiar with the adage you are what you eat. So what effect does food have on the mind and ātmā?

Since Vedic times, the rishis meditated and computed the effects of diet on man's thoughts, his higher consciousness, and his ātmā. Gleaning the empirical truths, they prescribed holistic injunctions of diet purity to edify his mind, body and ātmā.

The Chhāndogya Upanishad (7-26-2) reveals:

āhārshuddhau sattvashuddhiḥ sattvashuddhau druvā smṛtiḥ,
Smṛtilambhe sarvagranthinām vipramokshaha.

– “purity of diet purifies the antahkaran (heart). A purified antahkaran stabilises the mind which aids meditation on Paramātmā, and after mastering meditation, all the baser instincts (vāsanā) are eradicated and this leads to moksha”.

‘Purity of diet is the cause of antahkaran’s purity and if the diet is not pure, the antahkaran becomes polluted with vāsanā.

– Bhagwān Swāminārāyan
(Dharmāmṛt 3/47)

'If food is pure then buddhi remains pure and if it is impure buddhi is spoilt.'

Aksharbrahman Gmātītānand
Swami (Swāmini Vāto 11/6)

Compassion for all life forms in the
Vedas

"May all creatures behold me with
the eyes of a friend."

"I behold all beings with the eyes of
a friend."

"We behold each other with the
eyes of a friend."

— Yajur Veda (36.18)

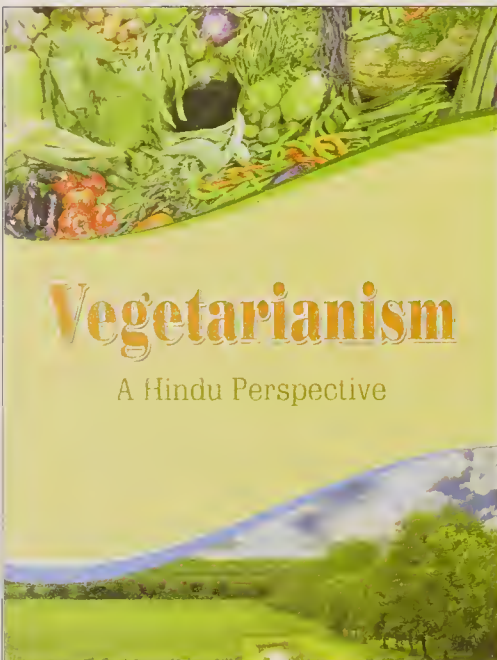
"May I be dear to animals."

— Atharva Veda (17.4)

"Those noble souls who practice
meditation and other yogic ways,
who are ever careful about all
beings, who protect all animals, are
the ones who are actually serious
about spiritual practices."

— Atharva Veda (19/48/5)

For details of vegetarianism and
clarifications about ahimsā and
yagnas in the Vedas see the author's
book: Vegetarianism — A Hindu
Perspective, Swāminārāyan
Aksharpith © 2008.



The Chhāndogya Upanishad advocates this eternal truth for the benefit of mankind. In this chapter we examine its subtle concepts and practical applications in our daily lives.

Initially one has to bear in mind that one has been granted a human birth by Bhagwān's grace. Only with a human body is sādhanā possible to transcend *punarjanma* — the cycle of rebirths. The shāstras echo this:

|| shareeramādyam khalu dharma sādhanam ||

— the human body is the only means to observe dharma.

Therefore only man has the gift of a conscience — the intellect to discriminate between good and bad, and about his duty in society. This dharma can be observed only with a human body.

Secondly, this human body is composed of the *Panch Mahābhūts* — five elements, namely: earth, water, fire, air and space. As such it is sustained by air, water and food. The body's life force, known as *prāna* is sustained by food. In other words *prāna* is dependent on food. Therefore if diet is impure, *prāna* too is vitiated. To correlate with the Chhāndogya Upanishad's shloka, a defiled *prāna* will pollute the mind and *antahkaran*. And a polluted *antahkaran* topples the *ātma* from spiritual ascent, from moksha. Hence the shāstras consider diet purity vital for spiritual ascent.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan on purity of the senses

In the Vachanāmṛt (Gadhadā I-18), the foremost shāstra of the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan stipulates purity of 'diet' of all the five *jñān indriyas* — senses of perception. He says, 'If the jiva avails of a pure diet for the respective *indriyas* then the *antahkaran* will be pure. If the *antahkaran* becomes pure then the *jiva* experiences unbroken rapport with Bhagwān, and if the 'diet' of only one of the five *indriyas* is polluted, then the *antahkaran* too is polluted. Therefore, the reason for any discord experienced by a devotee of Paramātmā, is solely due to the 'diet' of the five *indriyas*, not the *antahkaran*.'

The 'diet' of the five senses are: sight for eyes, hearing for ears, smell for nose, taste for tongue and touch for skin.

Here there is only scope to consider food literally as diet for the tongue — *rasnā indriya*. The first fundamental criterion in observing diet purity is of *ahimsā* — non-injury.



Ahimsā (non-injury)

The Mahābhārat (Dronaparva 165/29), the Vāsudeva Mahātmya (20/21), and Padma Purāna (1.31.27) stipulate that *ahimsā* is the highest dharma:

॥ *Ahimsā paramo dharma* ॥

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan also forbids killing any creature whatsoever and forbids meat and alcohol, hence advocating a vegetarian diet (Shikshāpatri 11, 12, 15).

Pāp karma (sin)

The shāstras consider the following as *pāp* karma:

‘Anyone who assists animal slaughter, sanctions it, cuts the flesh, buys, sells or even serves it, is equally sinful as the one who slaughters the animal’ (Manu Smṛuti 5.51).

The Mahābhārat (Anushāsan Parva 13.116.14) reveals the destiny of the meat-eater,

“‘One who desires to increase his own flesh by eating the flesh of others becomes eligible for Hell,’ so declares Nārada.”

A question is then often posed to vegetarians; does not plucking vegetables and grain amount to *himsā*? This enigma can only be resolved by having faith in the rishis who were inspired by Paramātmā. They ordained a vegetarian diet which involved minimum *himsā* for man’s survival. For the minimum injury incurred, they stipulated atonement in the form of donating ten per cent of one’s income to Bhagwān.

The second criterion when considering diet purity is the inherent attribute of the food, known as *guna*; whether it is *tāmasic*, *rājasic* or *sāttvic*. These attributes are classified by Shri Krishna Bhagwān in the Gitā (17/8,9,10).

Tāmasic foods

The attribute of *tamoguna* means a state of darkness, ignorance, lethargy and inactivity. A person in this state has no control of himself, for example, during bursts of anger or in deep sleep. Although the act of being angry and the violence which may stem from it, is *rajoguna*, being overwhelmed and blinded by it, is *tamoguna*.

Foods which increase *tamoguna* are known as *tāmasic*, such as: that which is old, stale, which has lost its basic goodness and flavour, half-cooked, which smells, is heavy to digest, impure, cold, partly eaten by somebody else, which contains bugs and hair, onions, garlic, asafoetida and animal flesh, eggs, alcohol and drugs.

The doctrine of *ahimsā* proved fascinating to European travellers to India in the 1600s. They questioned Hindus about its philosophy. ‘They observed with astonishment animal hospitals, widespread vegetarianism and extraordinary kindness even to the most lowly creatures. Indian vegetarianism... contributed to a crisis in the European conscience.’

The Bloodless Revolution by
Tristram Stuart (2006:xx)

‘Those who are ignorant of this real dharma, though wicked and haughty, consider themselves virtuous, kill animals without any feelings of remorse or fear of punishment, are devoured by those very animals in their next birth.’

Bhāgavatam 11.5.14

Sea creatures

Fish are freely living creatures. They are not ‘sea vegetables’ as is often classified by some in the West and in coastal regions of India. Therefore the term ‘flesh’ also includes fish and other living freshwater and marine creatures such as lobster, crab, etc. As such they do not conform to the ideals of Hindu vegetarianism and so are inedible. Killing these creatures for food amounts to *himsā* and *pāp* karma.

Since meat is *tāmasic*, inducing lethargy, carnivores tend to be lethargic, e.g. big cats, crocodile, python.



lethargic lion

Flesh Agribusiness

The more grain fed to livestock, the less left to feed people. Nearly 40% of the world's grain is fed to livestock.

US grain & cereals fed to livestock is 70%.

1,400,000,000 people could be fed grain and soybeans eaten by US livestock.

(Source: John Robbins, The Food Revolution, 2001: 285-292).

'Beef has become a symbol of the extravagant, resource-consuming American who is destroying the global environment to live a life of luxury,Strictly on a scientific basis, there can be no dispute that corn and soybean can provide food for more people when they are eaten directly by people rather than being fed to swine or poultry to be converted to pork, chicken meat, or eggs for human consumption.'

*– Peter R. Cheeke,
Prof. of Animal Agriculture,
Oregon State University, USA.*

(Source: Contemporary Issues in Agriculture, 2nd ed., 1999:74).

Meaty taste

'It is the uric acid that gives the flavor to meat. Uric acid causes gout.'

*(Source: 'What's wrong with meat?'
by Jay Hoffman Ph.D., 1985:2).*

The shells of eggs can get contaminated with salmonella bacteria by contact with chicken faeces. It can also enter the chicken in chickenfeed, such as ground up carcasses of dead chickens. Another problem is the presence of hormones in eggs, given to poultry to make them fatter and heavier faster and produce more eggs. These hormones upset our body's normal hormonal equilibrium, leading to disorders such as: excessive hair growth, early maturity, depression, etc. Salmonella infected eggs sicken 650,000 Americans & kill 600 annually.

(Robbins 2001:130)

Flesh

A diet of animal flesh stimulates the indriyas, inciting man's baser instincts. He is more prone to bursts of anger, hate and violence. His libido is also boosted. Hence he is overwhelmed by passion and craves to satiate his carnal desires. The net effect on the individual is mental discord and discontentment – ashānti. The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics opines that,

'The most serious indictment against flesh eating is that meat is a stimulant and its heating properties act upon the system by increasing the power of the animal in man. By meat eating.... in other words, the temptation to sensuality of all kinds is strengthened. Moreover the benefit is not only relief from certain troublesome physical sensations but a marked purification of thought and desire.'

This observation is clearly reflected in the lives of those who eat meat compared to vegetarians. In the West bullying and violent behaviour is common in schools. Teenagers roaming the streets are more prone to violent behaviour such as kicking trashcans, smashing windows and damaging seats in public transport vehicles. Incidences of grievous bodily harm too, are high among the young in the West. Such behaviour is remarkably absent among vegetarian schoolchildren and young Hindus worldwide. The calming, sāttvic temperament accruing from a vegetarian diet is also seen in animals. Herbivores are docile, whereas carnivores are innately aggressive and violent.

Eggs

Even unfertilised eggs are considered animal flesh. An egg has the genetic material capable of developing life. It breathes and metabolises – the two basic criteria for a living cell. It is also a product released from the reproductive system of an organism. Hence it is both tāmasic and rājasic. An unfertilised egg is not 'vegetarian' as is fiercely touted by the Indian egg industry, to mislead the uneducated and gullible sections of society.

In a similar vein, some argue that milk too is not 'vegetarian' but an animal product. Agreed. However two



aspects of milk render it *sāttvic*. Firstly, it is a secretion borne by the love – *vātsalya* – of the cow for its calf and not a product of the reproductive system like eggs. Secondly, it is not a genetic cell and hence has no genetic material to produce life. There is no *himsā* committed in taking milk. These virtues render milk edible, *sāttvic* and ‘non-sinful’.

Rājasic foods

Rājastic foods are hot (both in temperature and taste), which induce unquenchable thirst (*lukhā*), fried, fermented, roasted, boiled, very bitter, very sour, those left over a long time, which induce a burning sensation and the mouth to salivate such as MSG (see p.356) and those which induce pain, misery, apathy, depression and disease. These also include substances which alter normal consciousness, mood and mental poise, such as: alcohol, drugs, tobacco, aphrodisiacs, and caffeinated beverages (*Shikshāpatri* 15,18). In Sanātan Dharma, drinking liquor is one of the *Panch Mahāpāp* – five great sins (*Manu Smṛuti* 11/54). Anabolic and normal steroids and medications from chemical or vegetarian sources to treat disease are permissible.

Sāttvic foods

These foods are:

- *rasyā* – juicy e.g. milk, honey, fruits
- *snigdhā* – oily e.g. ghee, butter, vegetable oils and cooked vegetables.
- *sthirā* – nutritious e.g. pulses, grain, dried fruits, nuts.
- *hrudyā* – those which are likeable e.g. āmlā, citrus fruits.

These result in longevity, strength, peace, contentment, mental stability and therefore lead to spiritual progress.

Since a solely *sāttvic* diet is not practical for the average individual, a balanced *rājasic* and *sāttvic* diet conforms to diet purity.

Four types of Doshas

Besides the three *gunas* of diet, there are four types of *doshas* – inherent failings of foods, which also need to be considered in diet purity. Such foods should be avoided as far as possible.

Garlic and Onion

Medical researchers list many health benefits of these two tubers. However, here one has to honour the wisdom of higher authorities; incarnations and *śāstras* which forbid them to promote spiritual health. The *Shiva Purāna* forbids alcohol, meat, onion and garlic. The *Manu Smṛuti* (5-5) declares, ‘The *pāp* (sin) incurred by eating garlic, onion and inedibles is equivalent to that of drinking liquor.’

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan also forbids them (*Shikshāpatri* 62,63).

Despite being vegetables, garlic and onion are innately *tāmasic* and *rājasic*.

‘As an aphrodisiac, onion stands second only to garlic. It increases *libido*.’

(quoted from:

<http://www.crystallotus.com/herbs/>).

Scientific testimony for garlic’s *tāmasic* effects:

In the 1950s, some test flight pilots were advised to avoid garlic 72 hours before piloting planes because it slowed down their reaction by three times. Twenty years later, it was discovered that garlic desynchronises brain waves because the sulphone hydroxyl ion in garlic penetrates the blood-brain barrier and is a specific poison for higher life-forms and brain cells. Dr. Robert Beck therefore advises people who suffer from headaches or attention deficit disorder, or who can’t focus on their computers to avoid garlic and see the drastic improvements.

Source: Dr. Robert C Beck, DSc, lecture given at the Whole Life Expo, Seattle, WA, USA, March 1996, Nexus Magazine

Asafoetida (hing)

Asafoetida is forbidden in the *Swāminārāyan sampradāya*. Being an aphrodisiac, it is *rājasic*. Therefore its undesirable effects on the mind (subtle state) and *kāran sharir* (causal body) far outweigh the health benefits to the physical body.

The *shāstras* cite numerous examples of *āshray dosh*. *Ekalshrungi rishi* toppled from his pure path of austerities after being served rich, spicy, *rājasic* food by a prostitute. Another example cited, is of an unrighteous person like *Duryodhan*. During the *Mahābhārat* battle, the staunch celibate *Bhishma*, could not fight for righteousness, though aware that *Shri Krishna* was an *avatār*. He attributed this to having eaten food of the unrighteous *Duryodhan*.

Food or medications made by a sinful person or one whose character is not known, should be avoided.

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan
(*Shikshāpatrī* 31)

FAQ

Many Hindu vegetarians have sent queries and are disturbed about milch cows in some countries in the West, which are still routinely given ground up bones, hooves, etc. in the cattle feed. Is milk from such cows *sāttvic* and edible?

It is not *sāttvic* but *tāmasic* and therefore not edible. Ideally, Hindus should avoid such milk and products made from such milk, such as yogurt and chocolate. Plant milks can be used instead.

An incident sheds light on this issue. *Bhagwān Swāminārāyan* was once offered buffalo milk by *Jayā*, *Kāthi* princess of *Gadhadā*. Since it smelled of garlic, he refused to drink it. He then admonished her for letting the milch buffalo wander in *Gadhadā's* streets. Evidently, the buffalo had eaten some garlic thrown away by vendors.

- i) *Swabhāva dosh* – those foods which are inherently impure or polluted such as: meat, eggs, alcohol, rotted or decayed food. The *Manu Smṛiti* (5/5, 19) includes and forbids onion, garlic, mushrooms and salagam (*Brassica campestris vavapa* – a type of tuber). The probable reason in forbidding mushroom is that it is a saprophyte – that which grows on dead and decaying matter. This is not considered *sāttvic*. Therefore green plants, which use natural elements gifted by *Bhagwān*, such as light, water and air to make food using chlorophyll, are considered *sāttvic*.
- ii) *Nimit dosh*. This concerns external factors which render the food impure. For example, those made commercially outside the home, those in which macro organisms have entered and cooked food which has not been covered – in which insects, droppings or dust have fallen.
- iii) *Āshray dosh* concerns people connected with the food in some way. For instance, the person cooking the food may not be of a pure character. His karmas may not be righteous (*dhārmic*). Or a person with bad *swabhāvas* may have handled or served the cooked food. Just as energy is inter-changeable and cannot be destroyed, the bad karmas can be likened to bad energy, which is passed on. This *dosh* also includes the purity of the cooking vessel. It may have previously been used to cook *tāmasic* food like meat. Also it may not have been washed with filtered water before cooking.
- iv) *Swatva dosh*. This concerns purity of a person's earnings. Examples of *Swatva dosh* include wealth procured unethically; by stealing, gambling or fraudulent means. The only money which is free of *Swatva dosh* is that earned honestly, by the sweat of one's brow, and after donating ten percent to *Paramātmā*.

Of the four *doshas* of diet purity, the most important is *Swatva dosh*.



In discussing diet purity as ordained by Sanātan Dharma's shāstras such as the Upanishads, Manu Smṛuti, Gitā and Shikshāpatri, the concept of the three *gunas* and the four *doshas* cited above, can be incorporated into four categories in daily living:

1. Diet purity in the kitchen,
2. Diet purity in the home shrine,
3. Personal diet purity, and
4. Diet purity relative to time and seasons.

Diet purity in the kitchen

The following injunctions should be observed:

- Milk, water and other liquids should be filtered (Shikshāpatri 30). This injunction, however minor, is as relevant today as it was prior to modern water purification techniques.
Dry items such as flour and spices should be sieved to check for insects and maggot-like organisms, common in tropical climates.
- When cutting or chopping fruits and vegetables, care should be taken to remove those infected with visible macro-organisms such as maggots and tiny caterpillars. These are common in aubergines (egg plant), peas, pigeon peas (*tuwar*), cauliflower and *bhājis*.
- Fruits and vegetables should be washed properly, to remove pesticides and weedicides, microscopic cysts and eggs of worms and unicellular parasites such as *Entamoeba Histolytica*. The latter causes amoebic dysentery in the tropics.
- Cooked food should be covered, especially in warm climates where air-borne insects are common. Those who keep pets such as cats or dogs should place cooked food in a cupboard away from pets.

'One who desires prosperity should keep food and milk covered' (Mahābhārat, Shānti Parva 228/59).

- If possible play bhajans of bhakti while cooking and avoid *māyic* effects of TV, radio, etc.

A news article appeared in London's Daily Mail of 10th July 1996, entitled, 'Why water isn't kosher.' It revealed the presence of tiny freshwater shrimps in tap water supplied by the Thames Water Authority! These are not killed by chlorine treatment. Though harmless to humans, *himsā* will be committed by drinking such water. The article advised, 'tying a fine cotton muslin over the tap'; a practice observed since ancient times in India!



Freshwater shrimp (*Gammarus pulex*) max. size 11 mm



Entamoeba histolytica



E. coli 0157:H7

About 200 people in the US officially become sick every day from *E. coli* 0157:H7, & several die. Primary source of *E. coli* 0157:H7 infections: Hamburgers & other forms of ground beef.

70% of US chicken carcasses are contaminated with *Campylobacter* bacteria, which kills more Americans annually than *E. coli* 0157:H7 and causes illness in more than 5000 people every day.

(Robbins 2001:124,127,128)

Cochineal is also used to colour commercial grapefruit juice pink.

Why are fries so tasty?

A fast food giant in the US admitted on 28 March 2000 that its fries did contain a small amount of beef flavouring. 'That's why they taste so good,' observes Eric Schlosser in his best seller 'Fast Food Nation' (2002:278).

Purity of the packing container is also an important factor in commercially packed foods. For instance, the inner coating of tins used for tinned food by most companies, is gelatin. Hindus are generally unaware of this.

White toothpastes made by many multinationals use bone powder. It would be wiser to use herbal and Aynurvedic toothpastes and those labelled 'suitable for vegetarians'.

- If cooked items are to be stored in a fridge or freezer, a tentative expiry date should be written on the container, since some bacteria (e.g. *E. coli* 0157:H7, salmonella, listeria) do survive and thrive even in cold conditions and produce toxins. Even if such foods are reheated before eating, which may destroy the bacteria, the toxins still remain. These can cause vomiting, fever, diarrhoea and multiple organ failure. Besides physical ill effects or death, this affects the mind and *ātmā* by vitiating *prāna*.
- Freshly cooked food has *prāna*. Old, tinned foods and commercial foods lack *prāna* and also vitiate it. This is a probable factor in inducing lethargy and moodlessness after eating such foods. They use more *prāna* to digest them than they replenish!
- Food colours used in cake creams and Indian sweets such as jalebi and *bundi*, should be of non-animal source. Indian housewives are seldom aware that the bright red colour – cochineal/carmine (E120 in UK), is extracted by crushing a species of American cockroach!
- A check list of non-veg. E numbers should be stuck on the fridge for reference. Many E numbers in the UK, Europe and USA are of non-vegetarian source.
- Commercial food products such as fast foods, cakes, cake frostings, chocolates, bread, ice cream, jelly and yogurt may have animal products such as eggs, gelatin, lard (pig fat) and egg lecithin – as emulsifier. Manufacturers do not always specify the type of emulsifier used. It may be either egg lecithin or soya lecithin. Some products labelled 'suitable for vegetarians' should also be checked, since they may still contain egg lecithin. Lard is used in commercial bread to make it soft and to prolong shelf life.
- Commercially packed powdered spices – *masālās*, especially for *paun-bhāji*, invariably have asafoetida – *hing*, as do commercial poppadoms. It is preferable to grind one's own *masālās* from the whole spices to ensure purity. Unscrupulous merchants are known to adulterate chilli and *haldi* (turmeric) powders with coloured sawdust!



- Silver leaf, known as *varakh*, is used to decorate Indian sweets such as *barfi* and *kajri katri*. The leaf is hammered thin by placing a silver nugget between sheep intestines! *Varakh* is therefore not edible. BAPS has prohibited foods with *varakh* since 1996, not even to offer such sweets in Annakut.

A word of caution for jaggery – *gor* (Hindi – *gud*). Housewives invariably prefer the ‘beautiful clean’ yellow variety than the brown type which looks dirty. However to make the yellow type, manufacturers use the following chemicals to ‘clean’ it: sodium bisulphite, oxalic acid, phosphoric acid, citric acid, detergent powder and benzene (for whiteness)! To remove dirt from the brown type, natural juice of crushed *bhindi* (*okhra*) is used.

Foods NOT to be eaten everyday:
fermented foods, yogurt, salts, lentils, *vāl* (type of bean), flour, sprouted pulses, dried vegetables.

– *Ashtanghruday, Sutrasthān*
8/40-41. *Ayurvedic text by*
Vagbhata rishi, 5th century CE.

Foods to be eaten everyday:
shāl rice, barley, *sāthi* rice, *haritaki*, *āmlā*, black raisins, mung, *sākar*, ghee, rainwater, pomegranate, *sindhav* (rock salt).

– *Ashtanghruday, Sutrasthān*
8/42-43.

*Patram pushpam falam toyam yo
mey bhaktyā prayachchhati,
tadaham bhaktyupatdrutamashnāmi
prayatātmanah.*

– *Shri Krishna (Gitā 9/26)*

– *I accept a leaf, flower, fruit, water
offered to me with devotion .*

*In an outdoor picnic, in the absence
of a metal dish, thāl may be offered
in a new disposable dish.*

Diet purity in the home shrine

- Time and faith – *shraddhā* – permitting, it is a desirable bhakti ritual for a person to have a shower and wear washed clothes before offering *thāl*.
- After visiting the lavatory, one should take a bath before continuing cooking.
- Before entering the room with the home shrine, if one removes footwear with one’s fingers, then one should wash one’s hands before touching anything.
- In cold countries or seasons, it would be preferable to leave one’s indoor footwear outside the home shrine or a good distance from the *ghar* mandir.
- If possible, the utensils for *thāl* (plate, cups, spoons etc.) should be of metal such as steel or silver, rather than china, glass or plastic. They should be used only for *Thākorji*. Each item should ideally be placed in a bowl; items such as vegetables, rice and liquids, with a spoon in each. Fruits and salads may be garnished artistically. Ultimately, *Paramātmā* accepts one’s bhakti (*Gitā* 9/26).
- Hot items should be cooled to an ambient temperature before offering. This includes milk, *dāl*, soup, *khichdi* and fried items such as chips (fries) potato *vadās* and *bhajiya*. Blowing air with one’s mouth to cool an item ritually pollutes the *thāl* (ॐ / जुठ) and should be avoided.
- Water for *Thākorji* should be stored in a water jug/container, specially set aside for *Thākorji*.
- One should sing at least one short *thāl* bhajan. If time permits more may be sung. To familiarise and learn the tune and metre, one may initially play the *thāl* CD/DVD.
- While offering *thāl*, one should not talk, nor eat, nor taste any food items. If sitting cross-legged while singing the *thāl*, one’s hands should not touch one’s feet.

Yudashnāsi madarpanam
 – offer to Me what you eat.
 – Bhagavad Gita (9/27)



morning thāl in the home shrine
 of fruit, magas, chevado, saffron milk
 & water

Though it may not be so practicable
 today, the ancient shāstras
 advocated having a meal only after
 bathing.

*Vārdhul Smṛuti 75-76,
 Vishnu Purāna 3/11/73-74*

- After singing the *thāl* bhajan, the *thāl* – food dish – should be raised and offered to Thākorji, followed by water. The sanctified *prasād* should then be mixed with the respective items in the kitchen, thus sanctifying all the food.
- Abroad and in homes which only avail one cooked meal in the evening, a light *thāl* of *magas* or a similar sweet, or a dry or freshly cut fruit and warm milk may be offered to Thākorji in the morning, before leaving for work. Some devotees may choose to offer dry (home-made) snacks such as *chevado* or *sev-mamrā* as well. These items should be stocked separately for Thākorji, from which small portions are offered everyday.

It would be exuberant bhakti and *vivek* to offer home-made foods rather than commercial bread, biscuits, breakfast cereal, cake, pizza, *samosā*, *kachori* and so forth.

Personal diet purity

Many of the observances listed below have also been advocated by stalwart rishis of Ayurveda such as Charak and Sushrut from their endeavours, experiences and divine inspiration.

- Remove footwear and wash hands before starting a meal. Until recent times in India, it was customary to wash feet as well. In the early 19th century, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan used to bathe before every meal.
- Before the meal, with palms pressed together, chant a shloka. Mentally recall Bhagwān and one's spiritual guru to thank them for the meal. Pramukh Swami Mahārāj firmly believes and advocates that all family members get together to have the main meal of the day. A firm proponent for the survival and unbroken transmission of Sanātan Dharma's pristine traditions, he often poetically exhorts people to observe: '*bhāshā* (learn one's vernacular), *bhushā* (wear decent clothing), *bhojan* (follow a vegetarian diet) and bhajan (offer devotional worship to Paramātmā) in accordance with Sanātan Dharma's traditions.'



1. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan has enjoined devotees to have food and drink only after offering Paramātmā (Shikshāpatri 60).
2. Anger, anxiety, moodlessness and tiredness vitiate the digestive fire – *agni*. Therefore food should only be eaten when one is at peace and when truly hungry.
3. On the path of sādhanā, light meals are conducive. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan once advocated this principle after an amusing incident in Shiyal in Kathiawad. In the spring of 1815 CE, a severe frost solidified ghee. At the behest of devotees of Shiyal, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan commanded everyone to avail themselves of the solid chunks of ghee. However, the unbridled gorging resulted in distress and agony! Bhagwān Swāminārāyan then explained: ‘When eating food, leave space for *vāyu* (air) and water. Over-eating leads to an imbalance of *vāyu*, which pollutes *prāna* (vital force/energy). This then affects the mind’. In the *Gitā* (15/14), Paramātmā considers the digestive fire, known as *Vaishwānar*, to be one of his excellent forms. Therefore one should respect it and not burden it. Hence availing food becomes a form of Bhakti Yog.
4. Food which is inherently heavy to digest, known in Ayurveda as *vishtambhi* – causing constipation, should be avoided as a general rule. These include items made of *bājri* (millet) and plain refined flour. Constipation affects the mind and may also disturb sleep by inducing undesirable – *rājasic* dreams. If a lustful dream occurs, this adds to the *sanchit* karmas in the *kāran sharir* (causal body).
5. Ideally and with practice, one should take small morsels using only the forefingers and thumb. For second helpings, the left hand should be used. One should not touch ladles or spoons with the spoiled right hand. Therefore it is also a ritual of purity to keep the left hand clean. To tear a *chapāti* (*rotlo*, *parothā*, etc.) one should practice using fingers of the right hand only, rather than using both hands. Children should be taught this in early childhood.

One should wash both hands, both feet and mouth before having a meal. By this one accrues longevity.

– Sushrut Samhitā, Chikitsāsthān
24/98, Mahābhārat, Shānti Parva
193/6, Padma Purāna,
Śrutiśikhand 51/88

‘Householders should offer puja to devas, rishis, guests, pitrus and the devas in the house before having meals.’

– Mahābhārat, Shānti Parva
36/34-35

One who eats when overcome by jealousy, fear, anger, greed, disease, inferiority and hate, cannot digest his food. Therefore during meal times he should prevent such baser instincts and he should eat only in a pleasant and peaceful state of mind:

*Irshyābhayakrodhasamanvitena
lubhena rugdāinyanipiditena
viddveshayuktena cha
sevyamānamannam na samyak
paripākameti.*

– Bhāvaprakāśh, Dincharyā 5/228
(Ayurvedic text)

One should eat less. From this one develops six virtues:

*Gunāshcha shanmitabhuktam
bhajante ārogyamāyushsrashcha
balam sukham cha
anāvīlam chāsya bhavatyapatyam
na chainamādyuna iti kshipanti.*

– health, longevity, strength and happiness, good offspring and people will not say that, ‘He is a glutton.’

– Mahābhārat, Udyog Parva, 37/34

Yuktāhār viharasya... yogo bhavati
– only one who has control over food and other activities, masters Yog.

– Bhagavad *Gitā* (6/17)

Yogiji Mahārāj has enjoined devotees to do 15 mālās at night to repay debt incurred for the food eaten during the day, and to pray for the good of all those who made the meal possible; from the farmer who grew the raw produce to the cook.

Decorum during meals:

One should not malign food that has been served. Whether it is tasteful or not, one should have it affectionately, by respecting and honouring it. One should be joyful on having its darshan. Food eaten with due honour increases strength and lustre. That which is eaten by condemning it destroys strength and vitality (virya).

– Mahābhārat, Shānti Parva 193/6,
Taittiriya Upanishad 3/7,
Charak Samhitā, Sutrasthān 8/20,
Kurma Purāna, Uttarkhand 12/61,
Padma Purāna, Swarg, 51/64-65

One should eat in silence – tato maunena bhunjita.

– Skand Purāna, Brāhma, Dharmā
5/140

A more devotional (bhaktirup) approach is to do Bhagwān's smṛuti while having a meal.

– Bhagwān Swāminārāyan,
Vachanāmṛt Gadhadā I-22

One should not eat somebody's leftover (જુઝ – uchhista) or give one's leftover to somebody. One should not eat between the morning and evening meal, nor overeat, nor go about with food remnants in the mouth (unwashed mouth).

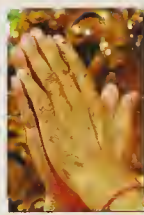
– Manu Smṛuti 2/56, Bhavishya
Purāna, Brāhma 3139, Vasishtha
Smṛuti 14/17

One should not create any sounds from the mouth while drinking, during āchaman and eating. If he does, he commits sin equivalent to drinking liquor.

– Nārad Purāna, Purva 27/80



6. Chew thoroughly. Do *smṛuti* of Paramātmā and one's guru while chewing. Food is venerated as *Annamay Brahman*. Therefore one should not offer negative comments about an item which is not cooked to one's taste nor leave extra food in one's dish at the end.
7. Drinking copious amounts of fluid while eating, hampers digestion. Ayurveda advises one mouthful of water in the middle of a meal and one at the end. More water can be drunk at least one and a half to two hours after a meal. Chilled drinks with food, also dampen the digestive fire. This in turn causes improper digestion, ultimately disturbing the *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha* equilibrium of the body, in addition to defiling *prāna*. While drinking water, the glass should be held with the left hand rather than the right, which is spoiled (એડું/જુઝ).
8. Hindu school children in the West should avoid soft drinks from cans/bottles which have been previously 'lipped' (એડું/જુઝ) and then offered to them by friends. Drinking water from spigots or taps which have been lipped, should also be avoided. Instead, one should take water from home.
9. During the day, when one drinks water, the lipped glass should be washed, for use by the next person. A better habit, common in India, is to drink water by raising the glass a few inches, without touching the lips. This may seem a trifle amusing, but it is traditional, religiously sound and hygienic. Excepting children, those who drink water straight from mineral water bottles should also try not to lip it and preferably use a glass.
10. Mothers of schoolchildren should devote special time and interest to cook varied and nutritious meals or snacks for their children's packed lunch. If a child is told to make his/her sandwiches everyday, he/she may get bored and may seek variety in the shops. This will invariably mean junk food, with a high sugar, fat and salt content. This may cause problems such as: obesity, nutritional deficiency and hyperactivity. The latter leads to a decreased attention span and concentration in class. He/she



may then lag behind the average pupil, leading either to loss of self-confidence or apathy.

11. During illness, a light diet is preferable, such as: *khichdi* and *mung dāl*. Heavy foods vitiate *prāna* and delay recovery. The effects then spill over into the ‘subtle’ body (mind) causing mental discord. Even diet or medications advised by a physician during illness, which flout the tenets of the *Shikshāpatri*, such as eggs, meat, alcoholic syrups, medications in gelatin capsules, and so on, should be avoided.
12. Except in a bed-ridden illness, one should not eat while lying supine. Neither should one have food or drink before the morning bath and *pujā*, except in extreme illness.
13. During *Ekādashi*, a waterless fast is ideal. However those unable to fast may take liquids, or if needed *farāri* foods (see p.431). Such fasting is an eternal Hindu tradition to please *Paramātmā*, by controlling and curbing one’s desires. Fasting once a fortnight eliminates the body’s toxins and wastes. In turn this clears the mental apparatus, enhancing mental clarity and meditation. A clogged system leads to mood swings, malaise, laziness, lethargy and unhealthy oversleeping. Medical researchers do advocate fasting, on an average of once a week. Novices to fasting may initially experience headaches or/and nausea. These tend to clear up with regular fasting.
14. Except during *utsavs*, one should avoid eating while moving about, as in buffet. The *shāstras* enjoin and consider it spiritually sound to sit cross-legged on a clean floor, in a peaceful area. This posture also boosts the digestive *agni*. Such practice should be encouraged and adopted rather than a table meal. In essence, an individual, believing himself to be *Akshar-rup*, offers food as *bhakti* to the *Purushottam* within, and not primarily the physical body. It is precisely for this reason – to maintain the purity of the *bhakti* ritual – that an item

Before having a meal, the shāstras advocate washing five parts of the body which bestows longevity: both feet, both hands and mouth.

– *Vyas Smruti* 2/69, *Padmapuran*,
Shrushtikhand 51/88, *Mahābhārat*,
Shantiparva 193/6, *Sushrut*
Samhitā, *Chikitsāsthān* 24/98

‘The shāstras advocate two meals daily for man – in the morning and evening. There are no meals stipulated in between. Those who observe this gain the fruit equivalent to fasting.’

– *Mahābhārat*, *Shānti Parva*
193/10, *Anushāsan Parva* 162/40

One should not have a meal or drink water in bed, nor eat while holding food in one’s hand nor by keeping the plate in one’s āsana (seat).

– *Manu Smruti* 4/74, *Sushrut*
Samhitā, *Chikitsāsthān* 24/98,
Skand Purāna, *Brāhma* 6/73,
Baudhyayan Smruti 2/3/6/6



having prasādam while sitting during the Swāminārāyan Akshardhām Mahotsav, New Delhi, 2005

Note on MSG (Ajinomoto)

Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is a flavour enhancer used widely in processed, frozen, canned, Chinese and fast foods. It is a powerful excitotoxin that has been linked to trigger migraine, headache with chest pain, dizziness, nausea, flushing in feet & mouth, numbness/tingling, palpitation, breathing difficulty, asthmatic attack, weakness, chronic drowsiness, stroke, tightening of facial muscles, overeating & obesity. It is also known to cause behavioural problems in children such as attention deficit disorder. As such MSG is rājasic & tāmasic and should be avoided.

Hidden MSG additives in commercial vegetarian products commonly used in the home

MSG manufacturers themselves admit that it addicts people to their products. These include: soups, ketchups, namkeens, chocolate flavoured protein powders, soya sauce, chilli sauce, soya protein concentrate, soya protein isolate, hydrolysed plant protein, maltodextrin, malt extract, yeast extract, fortified foods, calcium caseinate, seasonings, natural flavourings, carrageenan and anything “hydrolysed”.

Source: Russell Blaylock, M.D.,
Excitotoxins: The Taste that Kills
(1994).

With an unclean mouth, one should not approach a brahmin, guru, deity, king, stalwart samnyāsi, pujāri and a brahmin who gives sermons on Dharma.

– Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa 14/58

One should not eat to a full stomach at night.

– Skand Purāṇa, Brahma Dharma
6/63

which has been partially eaten (એક/જુટા) by somebody else is avoided. This ties in with point (8) above.

15. After having a meal one should cleanse the mouth and swallow a little water before getting up, a purificatory ritual known as *chalu*. After a snack or a light meal, for example during long-distance travelling by air or train, the fingers should be rinsed with some water rather than dry-wiping with a paper napkin. Without water, one is unable to rinse one's hands and perform *chalu* – ritual purity. For this reason, eating a sandwich or energy bar while walking or going from one building to another in college, does not conform to *āhār shuddhi* nor *bhakti* (ref. point 14).
16. The *śāstras* enjoin that except in poverty or *utsavs*, one should not eat food served in mandirs or a sacred place. One incurs a debt of the Deity. To repay the debt, one may offer *dān* (donation) or physical service.
17. One should never approach one's guru and senior sadhus (*sadgurus*) for blessings, with something in the mouth. This is especially applicable in mandirs abroad, where children and young people often casually stroll in while chewing gum or eating sweets, snacks, etc., and continue to do so while doing darshan. Even if a *pujāri* gives *prasād* such as *pān* or sweet food, devotees should keep it in their hands until exiting the shrine. If one's spiritual guru gives *āgnā* (command) to have the *prasād* in his presence, then one should do so without second thoughts.

Diet purity relative to time and seasons

1. Food should not be eaten at sunrise and sunset (Manu Smṛuti 4-55).
2. Food which is taken one and a half *pahor* (four hours) after sunset – after about 11 pm. is considered demonic – *rākshasi* and should ideally be avoided.



3. The Dharma shāstras forbid cooking and eating food during an eclipse (Shikshāpatri 86). Such food is regarded as impure. Furthermore, an eclipse has a detrimental effect on the digestive system (see Ch.19).
4. One should not sleep soon after a meal. Otherwise this vitiates prāna and therefore the mind.
5. A light and minimally spiced meal at night is preferable. A meal of fermented or fried foods such as, *samosā*, *dhoklā*, pickles, *chutney*, bread, *bhajiya*, *dosā*, *idli*, *uttapam* and similar items tend to induce unquenchable thirst. This may cause problems later at night, such as indigestion, acidity (heartburn), a rumbling gut or flatulence, leading to disturbed sleep and enervating dreams. This then spills over into the following day's activities; the first being the morning *pūjā*! *Dhyāna* (meditation) will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, with a disturbed gut, vitiated prāna, congested sinuses or a runny nose, due to ice cream, milk shake or fruit juice the night before.
6. During *Chāturmas* – the four months of the monsoon, shāstras forbid white radish (*mulā*), *mogri*, aubergine (egg plant) and sugar cane. The rishis have also advocated various types of fasts during this period, since cloudy skies and humidity dampen the digestive *agni*. Therefore devotees observe *ektānā* – one meal a day or *dhārnā-pārnā* during Shrāvan or even *Chāturmas*, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In addition to Ekādashis, fasting is also observed on Swāminārāyan Jayanti / Rāmanavmi and Krishna Janmāshtami. *Farār* is traditionally availed on Mahā Shivrātri. In some social groups and regions, women observe special fasts during the nine days of the *Navrātri* (*Nortā*) festival to please *Shaktimātā*.

7. Around the end of Aso, the third month of *Chāturmas*, new crops resulting from the recent rains are harvested. As a form of bhakti and thanking Paramātmā for His grace, people first prepare sumptuous foods from this harvest. They offer these to Paramātmā as Annakut, after Diwāli. Depicting exuberant devotion, huge Annakuts are offered in the Shri Swāminārāyan Mandirs in UK & USA. In the October 2000 Annakut, 1247 vegetarian

Miscellaneous:

a) In the *Shikshāpatri* (31), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan forbids taking medications of animal origin and alcohol. Today these include a wide range of products such as: cough and vitamin syrups, mouthwashes with alcohol, gelatin capsules, Vit. D₃ (made from lanolin – sheep wool extract), Ayurvedic *arishtas* & *āsavas* which contain alcohol.

b) Cosmetics, perfume, toothpaste, soap, shampoo and other toiletries that contain animal products or alcohol should be avoided. Use alternatives devoid of such ingredients.

c) However it should be clarified that the Swāminārāyan sampradāya does not espouse a vegan life style. Dairy products such as milk, butter, ghee and honey are allowed.

d) Woollen clothing is allowed. One should avoid using leather items, especially in a mandir e.g. belts, wallets, handbags, etc. Usage of animal skins for drums, *tablās*, *mridang* is allowed because manufacturers in India vouch that they have been procured from animals that have died natural deaths.

Note on Vitamin B₁₂

Hindu vegetarians in the West are constantly advised to take cyanocobalamin (B₁₂) injections regularly. However, just consider the fact that millions of vegetarians in India live healthy lives without any extra intake of B₁₂. Problems only arise if NRI vegetarians do not regularly have green vegetables, sprouted pulses, and most important, *chhās*, which contains *lactobacillus*. These three combined help synthesise B₁₂ in the gut. Hence an external source of B₁₂ is not necessary. In fact, physicians report that pernicious anaemia, caused by lack of B₁₂, is more commonly seen in non-vegetarians.



*Pramukh Swami Mahārāj
performing ārti of grand Annakut
at the Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir,
London, 2006*

*In case a non-farāri prasād is served
on Ekādashi or an auspicious fast,
one should not eat it.*

dishes were offered in the mandir in London. This was a record certified by the Guinness World Records.

8. *Prasādam* of mandirs, which is not conducive to one's constitution should be avoided. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan stipulates this in the Dharmāmrut (3/53). To consider a few examples: sweets for a diabetic, dairy products for those with milk allergies, hay fever, chronic sinusitis, asthma and hypercholesterolaemia, beans and pulses for those with gout and arthritis. Eating foods which cause flatulence (*gas*) leads to the same sequence of events as cited in point 5 above.
9. For some people certain foods, medications and vitamin supplements induce allergies or insomnia.



Obviously they should avoid these. For instance, a sugar-laden item, fruits or juice late at night. One to two hours after consumption, the sugar in the fruit or juice is converted to glucose, which acts as a stimulant for the brain. Hence, just at the onset of sleep or during the initial phase of sleep, glucose stimulates the brain. Additionally, *rājasic* and *tāmasic* items such as cream, butter, cheese and fermented and heavy foods in the evening, boost the passions and induce *rājasic* dreams. This is especially important for those observing *brahmacharya*, according to Bhagwān Swāminārāyan (Dharmāmṛut 3/56).

Vegeterianism & Longevity

'The Indians are not afflicted with headache or toothache or ophthalmia, nor have they mouth sores or ulcers in any part of their body. The age to which they live is 120, 130 and 150 years, though the very old live to 200 years.'

*– Arrian, Greek visitor to India,
1st century CE.*

How should a Hindu observe vegetarianism?

Think deeply about the following points :

(1) The Dharma shāstras forbid killing any creature and consider *ahimsā* as the highest dharma.

(2) It is Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's command in the Shikshāpatra (15) to avoid flesh and so followers, should aim to please Him.

(3) It is also Pramukh Swami Mahārāj's command and wish to be a strict vegetarian. To earn his blessings, we should do that which pleases him and not to do that which displeases him.

(4) Besides mankind, all creatures on earth have a right to a free life without suffering of any kind. Therefore we should worry about the painful lives that cows, pigs, chickens, etc. have to spend in small pens or cages just for the sake of our palate.

(5) Think of the *pāp* committed by the person who sanctions the killing, who kills the animal, who processes it, packs it, transports it, sells it and cooks it. Each commits *pāp* equally. This is stated in the Manu Smṛiti (5/51). Every sinful karma results in bad fruits, which will have to be suffered (repaid) either in this life or the next.

(6) Practically one should carefully read labels on food packets, chocolate wrappers and tins for ingredients which do not conform with Hindu vegetarianism's ideals.

(7) Take a vow (*niyama*) not to eat commercial foodstuffs at all. Yogiji Mahārāj always gave vows to devotees not to eat in restaurants.

(8) By eating foods made at home, or by relatives, satsangi friends and at the mandir, one preserves the total amount of one's accumulated *punya* (merit).

Conclusion

Such profound ideals of diet purity advocated by the shāstras collectively inspire man to live a 'samskarised' life. Modern medical science has only just begun to recognise the effects of food or rather certain food chemicals, only on the mind. However the ancient seers revealed the profound effects on the *ātmā*.

As we saw, the rituals and injunctions of Sanātan Dharma's diet purity, initially concerns *ahimsā*, with a minimal of sinful karmas. This means a vegetarian diet. The next factor concerns the *gunas* and *doshas*. For spiritual samskāras, even a vegetarian diet needs to be as *sāttvic* as possible and affected by minimum *doshas*. A further important factor is the need for moderation and discrimination (*vivek*). This includes not just the amount, but compatibility with one's constitution (*prakṛiti*), according to Ayurveda. Even intake of *sāttvic*, vegetarian foods which are not conducive to one's constitution can undermine one's physical and mental disposition.

Another important factor of diet purity, is that the food needs to be sanctified by offering to Bhagwān. As Shri Krishna commands in the Gitā (9/27), *Yadashnāsi madarpanam* – offer to me what you eat. One then avails of this *prasādam*, which sanctifies the body, mind and *ātmā*. However this is not the final goal. When the individual avails of this *prasādam*, he should ideally consider it a form of *bhakti*. Rather than feeding the body for sustenance, the individual considers it as an offering to the *Antaryāmin* – the inner Controller – Bhagwān. With this understanding in mind, the act of eating becomes a form of devotion – *Bhakti Yog*.

With such vigilant observance of diet purity, an individual is *samskarised*. His *buddhi*'s purity increases. This leads to purity of his *antahkaran* (heart), which then helps eradicate *vāsanā*. Once all *vāsanā* are eradicated, the *ātmā* is freed from rebirth and attains *moksha*. This injunction of the Chhāndogya Upanishad's seer cited at the beginning, is the heart of Sanātan Dharma's diet purity. In essence the seer is declaring that purity of diet is obligatory for *moksha*.



FAQs

1. Why do some people join their palms in *pranāms* or press their palms on their chest before and after having a meal?

This is an act of veneration to *Annadevatā*, as well as thanking *Paramātmā* for providing a square meal.

2. Why should one not eat or drink anything which has been eaten or drunk (એક/જુઠ) by somebody else?

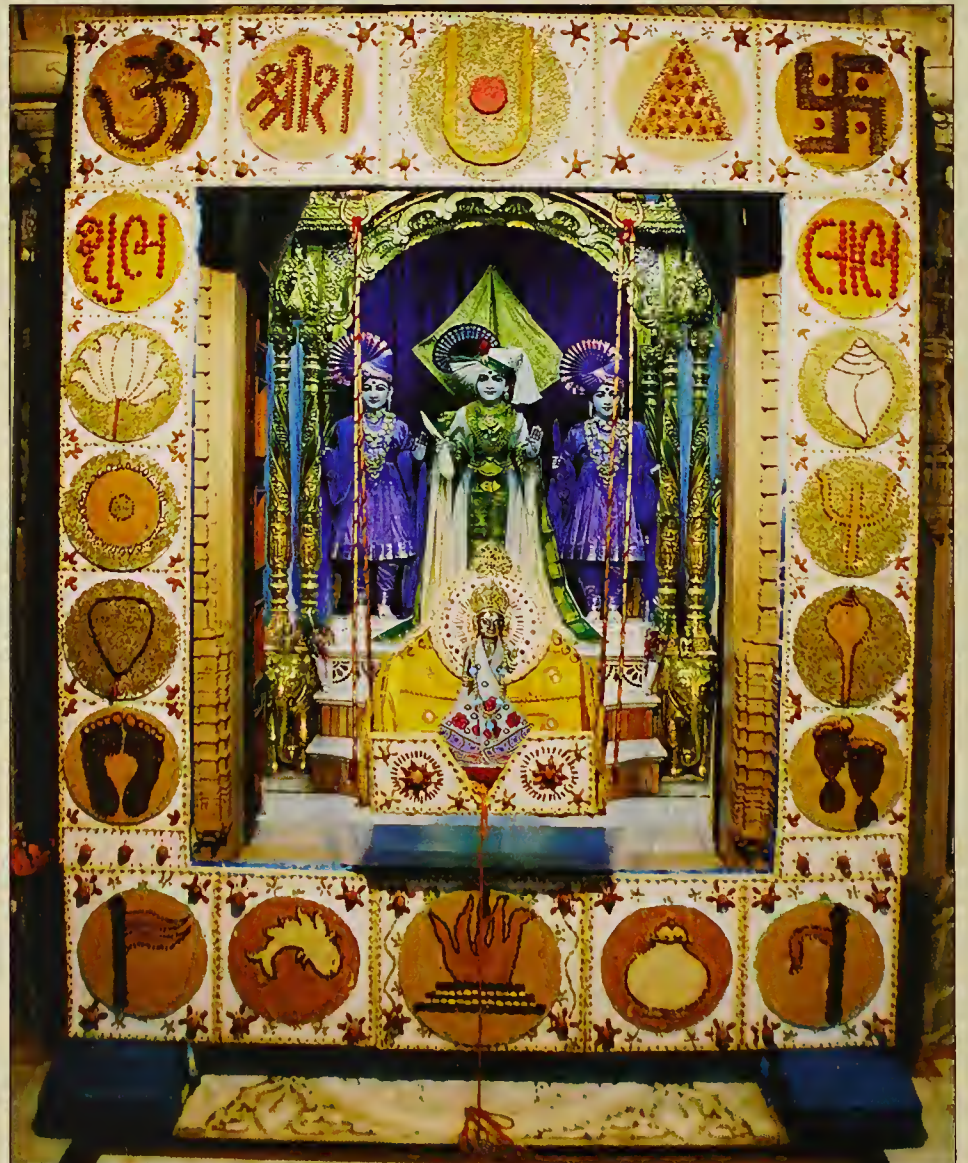
Eating a half-bitten fruit or sandwich or drinking juice from a container which has been lipped previously by a relative or friend amounts to ritual impurity. Something which is એક/જુઠ does not conform to the *śāstras*' ideals of *āhār shuddhi* (Yājñavalkya Smṛuti 1-6-162).

Essentially, when one eats or drinks, one is ideally offering this to the *Paramātmā* within (the *Antaryāmin*). Therefore this should be pure. In the BAPS Swāminārāyan philosophy, one is offering food both to Pramukh Swami Mahārāj – who is one's *Akshar-rup ātmā*, and Bhagwān Swāminārāyan, who manifests in him.

A Tamil family praying before having a meal, on eco-friendly 'dishes' of banana leaves!

Part 5 – Ritual Symbols

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*Hindolo (swing) made of pulses during Shrāvan,
with designs of auspicious symbols*



Introduction

Since antiquity symbols formed an inextricable part of man's life. Before the advent of an alphabet of any language, man communicated with symbols. Initially he adopted symbols from the natural world surrounding him. The most common were plants, birds, animals, moon, sun and fire. Gradually as language evolved, his use of symbols lessened, though it did not disappear completely.

Hence today, every culture has a legacy of symbols. It uses symbols as a language that communicates in silence. More precisely, symbols form the language of silence. They convey overt and covert messages. Often they may represent a profound sentiment or philosophical principle that cannot be concisely communicated through the written word. As such symbols can be termed *sutras* with profound import in graphic form.

Just as a nation's flag, a university's emblem or a company's logo reveals some unique feature about it, the diversity of Hindu symbols represent a wide spectrum of its philosophical principles and important ideals.

Therefore in Part 5, we examine only the important, as well as a few other symbols of Hinduism, their underlying principles and sentiments, and the role they play in 'samskārising' the daily lives of Hindus by enriching, fulfilling and making them meaningful.



34. OM



In Sanātan Dharma Om/Aum (ॐ) is the most auspicious sound, sacred word and mantra. It represents Brahman – the infinite universal consciousness.

It is phonetically composed of three letters or syllables: “a” (अ), “u” (उ) and “m” (म). By uttering Aum, the “a” syllable emanates from the vocal chords, followed by “u” in the mouth and merges into the last syllable “m” when the lips close. Aum encompasses the entire range of sound.

- The Upanishads state that Aum is the first word – *aum iti etad aksharam*. In the beginning there was sound which reverberated as Om/Aum. From this sound the whole creation came into existence (see origin of ॐ below).

- Aum is the Supreme Brahman (2/83).
- Aum represents Brahmā – the creator (Kath Upanishad 1.2.16-17)
- The Bhagvad Gitā (8/13) cites OM as Aksharbrahman:

॥ *Omityaikāksharam brahma vyāharanmāmanusmaran* ॥

– whoever controls his mind and repeats the one word OM, knowing it as Aksharbrahman and thinking of Me, leaves his body and attains the supreme goal.

- Aum is also the most sacred mantra. Its chanting leads to internal tranquility and *shānti*. It is also uttered before chanting other mantras of the Vedas and Upanishads.

- Of the three syllables of AUM, ‘a’ represents Vishnu, ‘u’ Shiva and ‘m’ Brahmā.

- Similarly, AUM’s three syllables represents the three Vedas respectively; Rig, Yajur and Sāma.

- Another name for Om is Pranava. Pranava stems from – Pra + root ‘nu’ – Pranava is that through which the Ishtadeva can be offered *stuti* (prayer). Using the word Pranava, the seer of the Mundak Upanishad stipulates the goal of human life:

॥ *Pranavo dhanuh sharohyātmā brahma tallakshamuchyate
apramattena veddhavyam sharavattanmayo bhavet* ॥

– Mundak Upanishad 2/2/4

Pranava (Om) is the bow, the ātmā is the arrow and Brahman (Parabrahman – the Supreme Reality) its target. It is



The Harappan OM on a seal. Note the sacred peepal leaves on the top. Its bow-shape has Vedic symbolism discussed in the text on the left

Naturally occurring ॐ in the Himalayas, on the way to Mansarovar



rotating the Vedic Harappan seal 90 degrees resembles the Devanāgarī OM.

(source: Hidden Horizons by David Frawley & N.S. Rajaram. Swāminārāyan Aksharpath (2006:103)

*etadvai Satyakāma param chāparam
Brahma yadonkāstasmā
vidvān etenaivāyatanenaika
rataramanveti*

– O Satyakam! Omkāṛ means both Parabrahman and Aksharbrahman. Therefore scholars faithfully follow (meditate) either one of the two.

– Prashna Upanishad 5/1

Q. Why is the word shānti repeated three times after ॐ or any other mantra?

A. Shānti is repeated thrice to circumvent the three worldly pains:

- (i) ādhyātmik – relating to the body and jiva such as illness, physical pain and passions.
- (ii) ādhibhautik – pain from an external enemy and
- (iii) ādhidaivik – pain or misery resulting from forces beyond human control, such as weather extremes, mental stress and distraction of the senses.

to be hit by an unerring person. Just as an arrow becomes one with its target, the ātmā should become one with Brahman. This is the Vedantic meaning. In Swāminārāyan Darshan, the meaning is that the ātmā becomes *Brahma-rup* and realises Parabrahman. It does not become one (merge) with Parabrahman as does light with light or water with water.

- It is also worshipped in the form of Pranava upāsana.
- The Mandukya Upanishad's seer describes four states of consciousness and how it is symbolised by chanting Aum:

	A	U	M	
state	waking	dream	deep sleep	liberation
name	Vishwa	Taijas	Prajnya	Turiya

- Turiya is the state of liberation (fourth state).
- The Gitā (17/24) says that the knowers of Brahman perform yagna and austerities and offer donations according to the shāstras' injunctions by always chanting 'OM'.
- Om when chanted in a deep and prolonged manner as 'Omkār' prānāyāma, calms the body, stills the mind and so helps in concentrating it during meditation. The effect is enhanced when 'Omkār' is chanted in a large group.
- 'The body of man should be used as the wood to be rubbed by undistracted meditation, on the word Om, which will lead to realisation of Paramātmā.'

– Rig Veda (1.164.39)

He who knows not the protector Om, cannot gain benefit from the hymns of the Rig Veda.

In the Gitā (8/13) Shri Krishna advocates chanting Om at the time of death to attain moksha:

*Omityaikāksharam Brahma vyāharanmāmanusmaran,
yah prayāti tyajandeham sa yāti paramām gatim.*

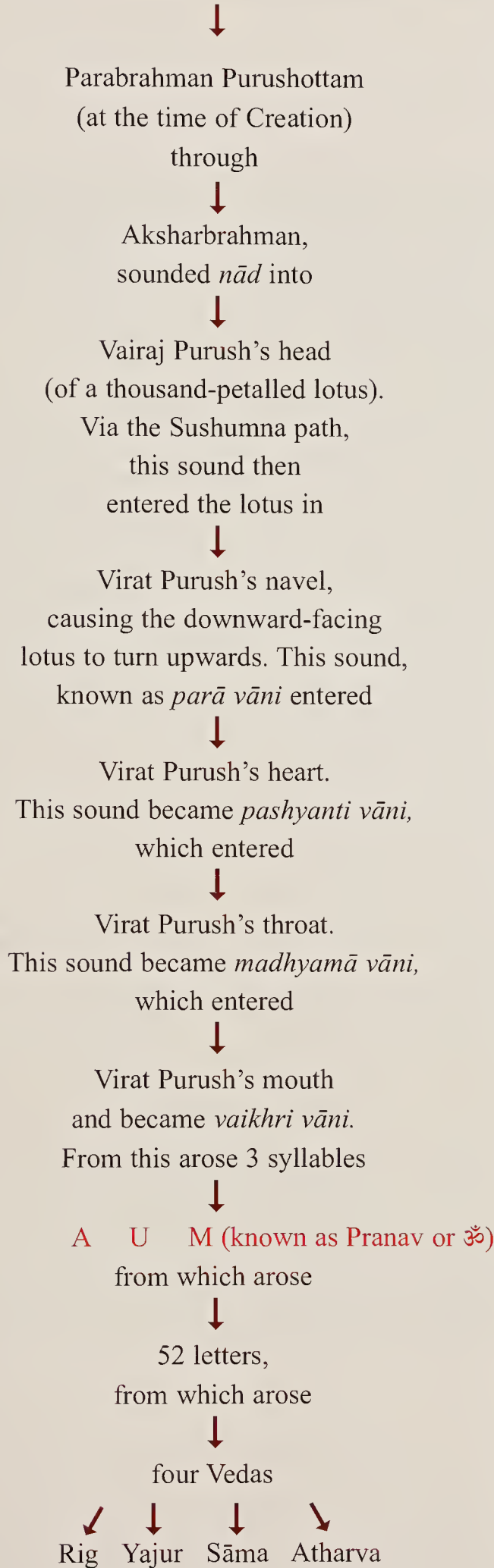
– one who dies while chanting the one syllabled ॐ and recalls Me attains the highest destiny.

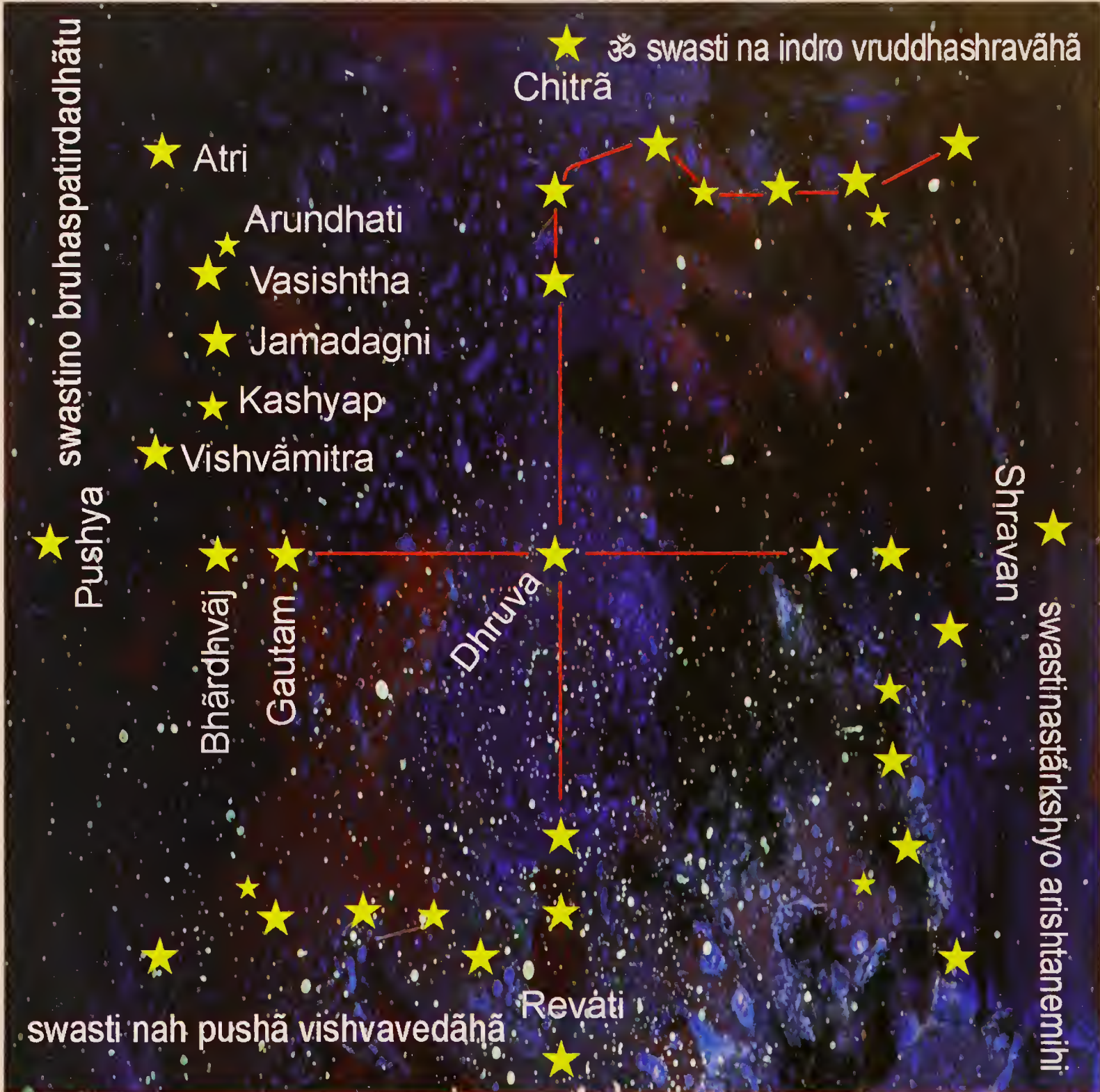
Origin of ॐ

Quoting the Bhāgvatam (11/12/17), Bhagwān Swaminaran explains how AUM arose, in the Vachanāmrut (Sārangpur 6). See flow chart opposite.



Origin of ॐ as explained by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan







35. Swastik

Swastik has been Sanātan Dharma's symbol of auspiciousness – *māngalya* since time immemorial. In Gujarati it is also known as *sāthiyo*.

Origin

The word Swastik has a definite etymological origin in Sanskrit. It is derived from the roots *su* – meaning 'well or auspicious' and *as* meaning 'being':

su asti yena tat swastikam

– swastik is that symbol through which everything auspicious occurs.

Scholars believe the word's origin in the Vedas, known as the Swasti mantra:

*Aum swasti na indro vrudhashravāhā swasti nah pushā vishvavedāhā
Swastinastārکشو arishtanemihi swastino bruhaspatirdadhātu.*

– Yajur Veda 25.19

– O famed Indra, redeem us. O Pushā, the beholder of all knowledge, redeem us. Redeem us O Garudji, of limitless speed and O Bruhaspati, redeem us.

This can be represented as a figure in the manner discussed below.

Swastik's cosmic origin

The swastik represents the living creation in the whole Cosmos. Hindu astronomers divide the ecliptic circle of the Cosmos in 27 divisions known as *nakshatras* (asterisms). They are named after a prominent star or asterism in the respective part of the zodiac.

Opposite Chitrā *nakshatra* lies Revati, the last and 27th asterism. Its presiding deity is Pusha.

Midway between Chitrā and Revati, lies the 22nd, Shravan *nakshatra*. Its presiding deity is Vishnu, represented by his vehicle Garud (cited in the mantra above as *arishtanemi*).

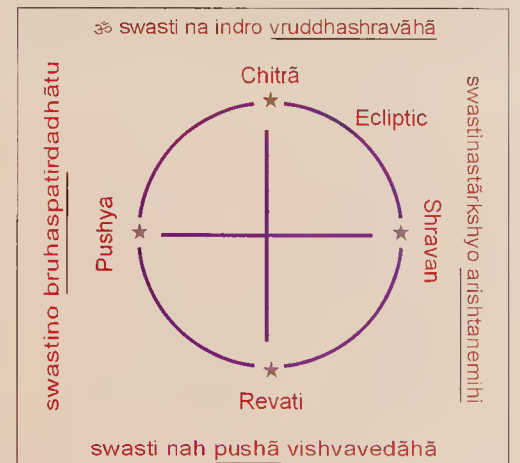
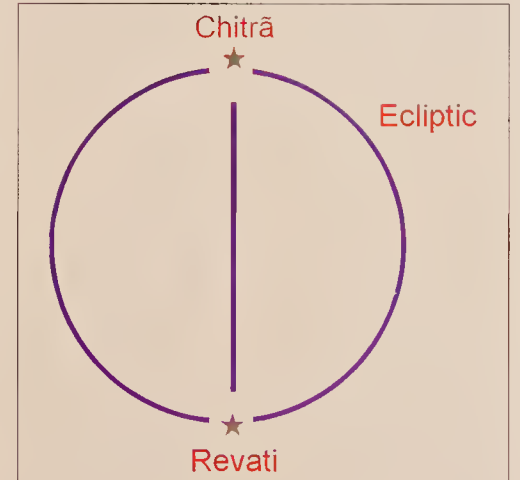
Midway from Revati, towards Chitrā lies Pushya, the 8th *nakshatra*, whose presiding deity is *Bruhaspati*.

In this manner, a cross forms in four directions in the celestial sky. At the centre of this cross is Dhruva (Pole star).

स्वस्तिक



Harappan seal with a string of five swasti signs. It can be related to the sacred swasti mantra of the Yajur Veda, reflecting yet older Rig Vedic shlokas, in which the word 'swasti' (welfare) appears five times



opp. page: Swastik's cosmic origin
(background painting: oil on canvas
by Sadhu Narayanprasaddas)

In a line from Dhruva, the seven stars known as Saptarshi can be observed. Saptarshi means seven rishis (*sapta + rishis*). In the present yuga of Vaivasvat Manu, the seven rishis are: (1) Gautam (2) Bhārdhvāj (3) Vishvāmitra (4) Kashyap (5) Jamadagni (6) Vasishtha and (7) Atri. A smaller star lies next to Vasishtha, which is Arundhati, his wife.

These Saptarshis revolve (perform *pradakshinā*) around Dhruva.

By drawing a line connecting the cross and the Saptarshis, the swastik is formed. In this way, the whole cosmos is incorporated in the swastik. When the swastik is imprinted during a *pujā* ritual, the underlying sentiment is of veneration to all the living creation in the whole Cosmos, represented by the seven rishis.

Swastik in rituals



The four dots in the swastik symbolically represent the sun, moon, earth and cosmos

Another meaning of the four dots is to realise the four *purushārthas* of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *moksha*.

1. Being an auspicious symbol with such inherently profound sentiments, the swastik is therefore used during *pujā* rites and rituals by Hindus. They imprint this using dry or wet kumkum on new articles, appliances, vehicles, entrance of a new business premises or home, etc. The underlying sentiment is that “let the article (being offered *pujan*) be redemptive (*kalyāṅkāri*) in life, not only for mundane purposes, but also to aid one on the spiritual path, towards *moksha*. Ultimately, for an aspirant any article, whether a PC or car, should enable him/her to progress towards *moksha*. This is in consonance with Sanātan Dharma’s ideal of attaining the four endeavours (*purushārthas*) of life: *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *moksha*.
2. The swastik symbolises *māṅgalya* – auspiciousness, peace, harmony and success in all ventures embarked upon in life.
3. Swastik is a symbolic form of Aum-*kār*.
4. It is a symbol of sacredness which wards off evil elements and heralds good fortune.

5. Swastik is imprinted on doorways of houses and ingrained in the flooring of mandirs as a symbolic form of auspiciousness (see pp.187, 373).
6. It depicts: Surya, the 'wheel of life' and four directions.

In India, the swastik has eternally embodied the following sentiments:

7. *kalyān* (ultimate liberation) – *swasti* – auspicious, *kalyān, ka* (क) – doer – one that bestows *kalyān*
8. man's quest to attain spiritual knowledge
9. prayer on behalf of all *jivas* for moksha
10. encompasses the whole cosmos
11. a symbol of Lakshmi – *devi* of wealth
12. a symbol of Vishnu. Its four bars represent Vishnu's four hands and Vishnu is the protector of the four directions (Vishnu Purāna)
13. protection from the four directions
14. symbol representing Sanātan Dharma and its sentiments of peace and moksha for all mankind.

Swastik in other cultures

Swastik was known and often commonly used as a symbol of fortune and prosperity in many other ancient cultures and lands as seen below on various artefacts discovered in these lands:

In 1889, Flinders Petrie discovered Greek pottery fragments with swastiks in Naukreetis, Egypt, of the 12th



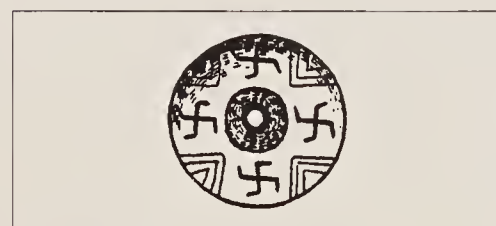
Cyprian vase with swastiks and figures of birds



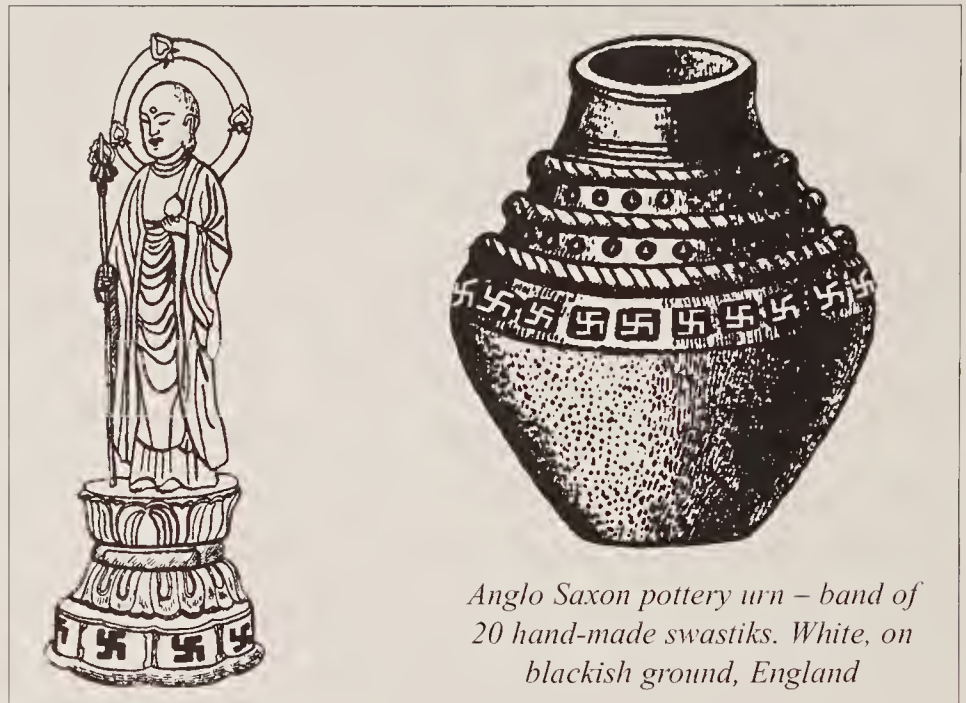
cinerary urn with swastiks in panels, Marino, Italy



It is also believed that the palm embodies the cosmos (brahmānd). The four fingers and thumb represent the cosmos through the five nakshatras (asterisms) as shown in the diagram. Since these are embodied in the palm, the swastik is also embodied in the palm. Therefore the cosmos is embodied in the swastik.



spindle-whorl with four swastiks, depth 33 feet, Greece



bronze statue of Buddha, Japan.
Eight swastiks on pedestal. Cane
tintinnabulum with six movable rings
or bells. 1/15 natural size

Anglo Saxon pottery urn – band of
20 hand-made swastiks. White, on
blackish ground, England



swastik of thin copper found in
Hopewell mound, Chillicothe,
Ross County, Ohio, USA

dynasty, circa 3000 BCE (Wilson 1973:71,92). The oldest painted swastik appears in a paleolithic cave dating back 10,000 years. It was also found on early Christian tombs and on 2000 year-old Jewish temples in Palestine. Though the swastik may have been used as a religious symbol in these religions, it did not have the same meaning of being redemptive (*kalyāṅkāri*), as it does in Hinduism. Neither did these religions have an exact etymological origin for the word 'swastik'.

Such ubiquitous occurrence of only one symbol, the swastik, throughout the ancient world from Europe, North, Central and South Americas to China and Japan, presents a compelling proposition; that of migration of people out of India. In his well-researched book, *The Swastika*, Thomas Wilson, in 1896 posited precisely this theory:

'If the Swastika was a symbol of a religion in India and migrated as such in times of antiquity to America, it was necessarily by human aid... Is it not equally strong evidence of contact to find the same sign used in both countries as a charm, with the same significance in both countries?' (1973:194, 195).

Furthermore, considering the probability of independent invention, Wilson opined, '...the chances of duplicate invention by different persons in distant countries, without contact or communication between them, are almost as one to infinity' (1973:196).

The swastik then, can well be presented as a tangible and contributory piece of evidence along with other findings



which have recently emerged, for the case of people migrating out of Bhārat and not invading it. In their recent book, *Hidden Horizons – Uncovering 10,000 years of Indian Culture*, (2006), N.S. Rajaram and David Frawley present irrefutable and impressive scientific evidence supporting this event, from diverse sources such as: the human genome project, natural history, satellite images of the great Vedic Saraswati river's palaeo channels, flora, fauna and climate in the Vedic literature and astronomical events in the Vedas.

The swastik is one of the 16 sacred signs found on the lotus-feet of the Supreme Reality – Parabrahman Purushottam Nārāyan. In the Padma Purāna, Brahmā describes these to Nārādji. Swastik is one of eight signs on the right sole. In his *Vaishnavatoshini* commentary on the Shrimad Bhāgavatam, Jiva Goswami cites that of these 16 signs, the more the number found on the soles of an avatār, whether two, four, five, the greater the avatār. During Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's time, many of His paramhansas, followers and non-devotees alike, observed all the 16 signs on His feet (see details on pp. 374-376).



Swastiks incorporated in the flooring of a Hindu mandir



36. Charanārvind

(lotus-feet of Paramātmā)



16 auspicious symbols on Bhagwān's lotus-feet

Charan means feet, *arvind* means lotus.

Sanātan Dharma's shāstras cite the occurrence of 16 sacred symbols on the lotus-feet of Bhagwān Purushottam Nārāyan. Brahma describes these to Nārādji in the Padma Purāna. Similarly they are cited or discussed in the Shrimad Bhāgvatam (10/30/25), Gopalottaratapini Upanishad (16), Kramdipika (3/15), Skand Purāna, and in the following commentaries of the Bhāgvatam: Sanātan Goswami's *Bruhattoshini*, Jiva Goswami's *Vaishnavatoshini*, *Sārārthdarshini* of Vishvanath Chakravarti and Shri Dhanpatisuri's *Bhagvatgudhārth*.

Citing the Padma Purāna, Jiva Goswami comments that of these 16 symbols, one who possesses all 16 of them is verily Parabrahman Purushottam Nārāyan. One who has two, four, five or more, then that avatār possesses correspondingly greater power.

During Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's incarnation on earth, from 1781 to 1830, many of His paramhansas, disciples and non-disciples alike, saw these 16 symbols on both His soles. Of the poet paramhansas, Premānand Swami versified them in the 'Vandu Sahajānand...' poems of *Nitya Cheshtā* (cited in *Vachanāmrut Gadhadā* II-48), Nishkulānand Swami in *Chinhachintāmani* in his Nishkulānand Kavyam, and Bhumanand Swami in *Ghanshyamlilamrutsagar*. The *Harililakalpataru* (3/63/1-43) and *Purushottamcharitra* (134/1-35, Dhyan pp.13-16) also cite these symbols on His lotus-feet.

Three notable instances of people who saw these 16 signs on Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's lotus-feet include:

- (1) The *pujāri* of Badrināth saw the symbols on Neelkanth's footprints imprinted on kumkum on the steps of the mandir in 1792.
- (2) Naniba, mother of Kashidas of Bochāsan, Gujarat, saw the symbols on Neelkanth's footprints on the ground, in 1799.
- (3) Ladudan Barot, the bard genius of Khan, Rajasthan, saw them on Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's lotus-feet in Gadhadā in 1805 CE. Erudite in the Sāmudric

चरणारविन्द



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj
consecrating Bhagwān
Swāminārāyan's charanārvind,
BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir,
Amdavad, 2000

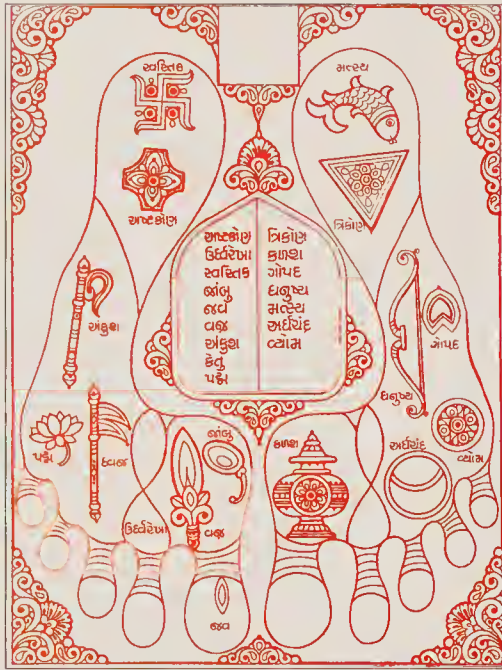
opp. page: Lotus-feet of Bhagwān
Swāminārāyan depicting the 16
auspicious symbols, Swāminārāyan
Akshardhām, New Delhi

shāstras, which describe the characteristics of people by the signs and moles on the body, he was instantly convinced of Swāminārāyan being Purushottam. There and then, he pleaded to be initiated as His sadhu. He became known as Brahmānand Swami, one of the most ingenious and versatile of Bhagwān's eight poets.

Ladudan Barot instantly composed a lyric in Gujarati citing the 16 symbols of Purushottam manifest:

kamal, dhvaj, ankush, jav, vajra, urdhvarekh,
ashtakon, swastik, nav dachchhin pad ching dekh,
gopad, dhanush, trikon, machcha, chandra, nābh, sāt,
chinha, vām pad chintavo, Purushottam sākshāt.

(Dave 2003 II:139)



right lotus-foot left lotus-foot
of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan

16 auspicious symbols on Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's lotus-feet

right	left
(1) <i>ashtakon</i> (octagon)	(1) <i>trikon</i> (triangle)
(2) <i>urdhvarekhā</i> (crease line)	(2) <i>kalash</i> (pot with coconut)
(3) <i>swastik</i>	(3) <i>gopad</i> (cow's footprint)
(4) <i>jambū</i> (black berry)	(4) <i>dhanushya</i> (bow)
(5) <i>jav</i> (barley grain)	(5) <i>meen</i> (fish)
(6) <i>vajra</i> (Indra's weapon)	(6) <i>ardhchandra</i> (crescent moon)
(7) <i>ankush</i> (goad)	(7) <i>vyom</i> (sky)
(8) <i>ketu</i> (flag on mandir)	
(9) <i>padma</i> (lotus)	

Why are Bhagwān's *charanārbind* venerated so highly?

Sanātan Dharma's bhakti shāstras and seers have eternally extolled the glory and worship of Bhagwān's *charanārbind* (lotus-feet), in essence of *dāsatva bhakti* – devotion as His servant.

Rig Veda

In the famous *Purnush Sukta*, the seer enjoins seeing all creation and creatures as the lotus-feet of Bhagwān – *pādosya vishvā bhutāni*.

Similarly the Panchrātra texts extol *pādsevanam* – service of His lotus-feet.



Vedic *karmakāṇḍ* texts enjoin Bhagwān's *shodshopchār* puṣṭi (see p.30), one of which is *pādyam* – of His lotus-feet.

Bhāgavatam

Brahmā prays that, 'In the next birth, grant me a body of an animal or bird by which I can serve Your lotus-feet' (10/14/30).

Brahmā prays for service not only of His lotus-feet but for a birth as an animal, bird, tree or vine, on which the dust of the feet of Vraj's inhabitants (Gopis) may fall, for whom Bhagwān Mukund (Shri Krishna) is *sarvasva* – whole and sole.

The Gopis in turn offer *stuti* (*prārthnā*) for the service of Nārāyan's lotus-feet, like Lakshmiji (10/29/37).

Sanatkumar also advises Mahārājā Pruthu, to conquer the senses and cross the samsāra ocean in the 'boat' of Bhagwān's lotus-feet (4/22/39-40).

Rāmāyan

Hanumānji says to Shri Rāma that, if he falls as a result of ego then, 'I will experience fulfillment only by falling at your lotus-feet' (Rāmācharitmānas 5, 32, 7-8, *dohā* 32).

Āchāryas such as Rāmānuj, Madhva, Chaitanya, Nimbārka and mystic poets such as Tulsidās and Surdās, have all begged for the humble service of Bhagwān's lotus-feet.



37. Purnakumbha



Purnakumbha, also known as *mangalghat* and *mangal kalash* in the Rig Veda, means auspicious pot. The Rig Veda regards it as a symbol of *aishwarya* (*Shri*), goodness (*saundarya*) and wealth. Hence it is also called *bhadra kalash* (10/32/9). The Atharva Veda cites the *purnakumbha* as filled with ghee or *amrut* (3/12/8).

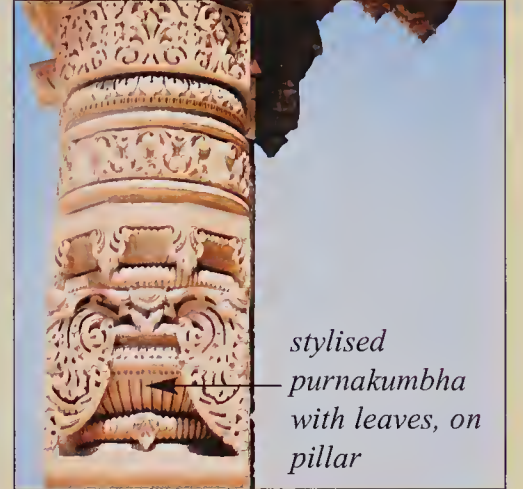
During the Samudra Manthan – churning of the ocean of milk – by the devas and demons, Bhagwān Dhanvantari emerged with an *amrut kumbha* (see also p.117 Mahā Kumbha Melā).

In ancient India, during a king's procession, eight women, each carrying the *purnakumbha*, followed him. During Bhagwān Shri Rāma's *rājyābhishek* – coronation, eight such women were present with the *purnakumbha*, as part of the auspicious ritual. During Sugriva's abhishek, 16 women were present with *udak kumbha* – water-filled pots.

Stylised *purnakumbhas* with lotus flower, stalk, leaves, elephants pouring water with their trunk, etc., and other auspicious symbols are sculpted on pillars of ancient structures in many parts of India, such as Mathurā, Sanchi stupa, Sarnath, Amravati, Hampi, Badami, Kapisha, Nagarjuna Konda stupa, etc. Another important place of the *purnakumbha*, is on the pinnacle of Hindu mandirs, as a structure named *Āmal shilā*. The use of the *purnakumbha* in deva worship rituals has been an ancient tradition in India. During puja rituals, it is believed that the *purnakumbha* symbolises Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva, who are invoked first.

पूर्णकुंभ

The difference between a *purna kumbha* and *kalash* is more ritualistic, rather than shape. In every puja ritual the *kalash* is first offered *panchopchar puja*, in which tirth water is to be invoked with the aid of invocatory mantras and the respective mudras of devas. Later, mantras are chanted which address the *kalash* as a *purna kumbha* or *amrut kalash*. The 'purna' then signifies that the *kumbha* is full to the brim, while four types of āyushya mantras are chanted.



BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan mandir,
Bhavnagar, Gujarat



Purnakumbha as āmal shilā
(āmalsāro) on the shikhar of a
BAPS Swāminārāyan Mandir



38. Kalash

The *kalash* is one of the most important auspicious objects and symbols of Hinduism. It consists of a water-filled pot with a *shrifal* (coconut) on its mouth. It is used in every auspicious *pujā* ritual, in which the *devas* and sacred rivers are invoked. *Kalash puja* is as obligatory as *Ganesh puja*. In fact, before the *devas* are invoked and offered worship, the *kalash* is first offered *pujā* and *namaskār*, after which *Ganesh puja* is performed.

During the *kalash puja*, four *shlokas* are chanted begining: *Kalashasya mukhe Vishnuhu...*, with the following sentiments; in the *kalash's* mouth resides Vishnu, in the neck Rudra (Shiva), in the base Brahmā, in the middle goddesses, in the abdomen all oceans, the earth comprising 7 islands (continents), the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, Atharva Veda, along with their subsidiary sciences, all are resting in the *kalash*. Here in the *kalash*, may Gāyatri and Sāvitrī (mantras), come to destroy evil and bestow peace. The *kalash* beholds all oceans, tirths, clouds and rivers.

All religious rites are performed with the *kalash* as witness. Golden *kalashes* crown the *shikhars* of mandirs, symbolising the heads of the deities.

A special *pujā* is performed of the *kalashes* before being placed on the *shikhars*. During the *prāna pratishthā* ritual of mandirs, the *murtis* are taken around the city, in a grand *shobhā yātrā* (procession), to bestow sanctity and peace. In this *shobhā yātrā*, women traditionally carry *kalashes* on their heads and so enhance the auspiciousness of the occasion (see photo).

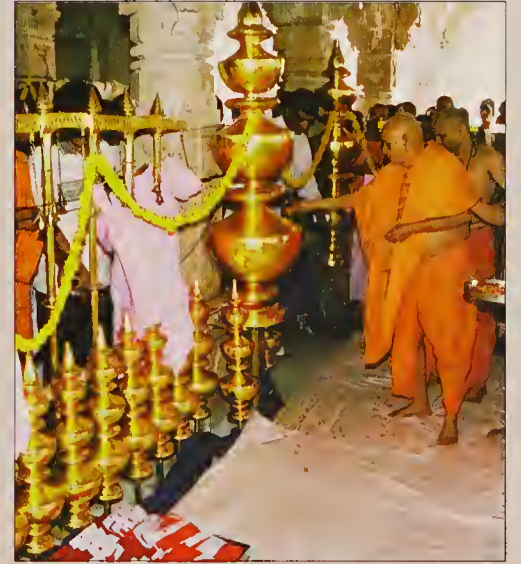


कलश



Kalash of the Nāgara style.

The kalash attracts energy and channels it to the garbha gruha.



Pramukh Swami Mahārāj performing puja of golden kalashes, BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Bhavnagar (2006)

mandir mahotsav shobhā yātrā, BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Bhavnagar (2006)



39. Deep (divo, diyā)

The traditional *deep* is a lighted wick immersed in an earthen or brass crucible containing ghee or oil. It is known as *divo* in Gujarati and *diyā* in Hindi. Its flame is known as *jyoti*. The glory of the *deepjyoti* is extolled in a Sanskrit *shloka*:

*Shubham karotu kalyānam ārogyam dhanasampadah,
shatrubuddhi vināshāya deepjyoti namo-stute.*

– O *deep-jyoti*! *Pranāms* to you, who confers auspiciousness, moksha, health, wealth, property and destroys evil intellect.

The *deep* is one of the most sacred symbols of Hinduism, with several underlying sentiments:

- It is a symbol of *agni* (fire) and knowledge.
- It represents Indian culture's effulgence, peacefulness, sombreness and cohesiveness.
- Its light kindles sentiments (*bhāvnā*) of purity and love in one's heart. Therefore people offer *pranāms* to the *divo*.
- The soft light of a *divo* of ghee kindles one's *ātmajyoti* and inspires one to look within for peace. The *divo* of cow's ghee is considered sacred, more than of any other substance. Therefore in all Hindu shrines, *divā* of ghee are preferred in *pujā* rituals. Its *pujan* is performed first. Its *jyoti* probably has certain unique vibrations (or wavelengths) which may have a greater benevolence on the body, mind and *ātmā*.
- *Divā* are used to perform *ārti* of the deity, as well as the spiritual guru.
- A woman performs her brother's *ārti* on Rakshā Bandhan before tying the *rākhadi* (*rākhi*) on his right wrist.
- In India a housewife lights a *divo* next to the holy tulsi plant in the evening, as a prayer for her husband's longevity (see p.404).
- Hindus light *divā* in windowsills and porch during Diwālī.
- Being a sacred symbol, it is incorporated in the floorings and walls of Hindu mandirs, in the same manner as the *swastik*, *shankh* and lotus.

दीप



ārtist's impression of an aspirant endeavouring to realise atmajyoti within (water colour by Sadhu Narayanprasaddas)



diyās kindled in homes during Diwālī



deeps in the flooring of mandirs





40. Tilak (sacred mark)



तिलक

Among all the world's religions, the *tilak* mark on the forehead is a custom unique only to Sanātan Dharma. The word *tilak* encompasses all marks on the forehead, whether *urdhvapundra*, *tripundra*, *chāndlo* or *bindi*. Different shapes and colours signify different sampradāyas. Apart from the religious traditions, Indian women more than men, tend to apply marks on their foreheads. These can be shaped round or in the form of horizontal or vertical lines.

The word *tilak* in Sanskrit, according to Panini's *sutra* is derived from *til* meaning sesame seed, which has great importance in *yagna* and *dān* (charity).



Shaiva tilak

Tilaks in various sampradāyas

Shaiv – Followers of Shiva imprint a horizontal tilak on the forehead with *chandan* or a *tripundra* – three horizontal finger marks with *bhasma/vibhuti* – ash (see photo right margin). Ash signifies that the body will ultimately be reduced to ashes.

Shākta – Followers imprint a red coloured *bindi*. Some use *sindur*. *Sindur* symbolises power and helps an aspirant increase his *tej* – lustre.

Vaishnava – Followers of Vishnu imprint an *urdhvapundra* tilak which is U shaped. There are 64 types of tilaks. The most common are: Vishnu Swami tilak, Ramanandi tilak and Shyamshri tilak. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Gaudiya sampradāya imprints an *urdhvapundra* tilak of sandalwood or *gopichandan*, lengthened onto the upper part of the nose.



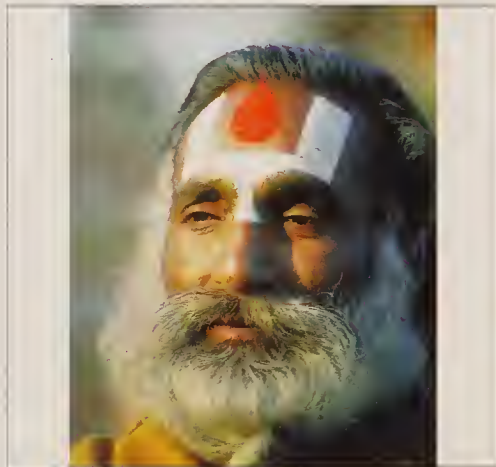
Varkari tilak

A tilak of three lines upwards on the forehead of a sadhu, with the middle being red and the adjacent two white, belongs to the Ramanujachari sect. The red line symbolises Vishnu and the two white – Shiva and Brahmā. As such they signify creation, sustenance and destruction of the cosmos. Another interpretation concerns Shri Krishna's *Rās lilā* on the banks of the Yamunā. The middle red line signifies Shri Krishna and the two white – the banks of the Yamunā (Shah 1998:5). A tilak of a single black horizontal mark belongs to the Madhvāchāri sect. Followers of Ganapati imprint only a *tripundra*. There are other variations for Tāntric and Kāpālik traditions.

opp.page: Tilak-chāndlo on Bhagwān Swāminārāyan (depicted as Neelkanth Varni), central shrine, BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Amdavad.



Ramānuj tilak



Rāmānandi tilak

The Swāminārāyan sampradāya's tilak is similar to Vaishnavism, with the addition of a kumkum *chāndlo* in its centre (see pp.228-229 for details).

Tilak in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

On Fāgan vad 1, Ashadhi Samvat 1877 (19th March 1821), in Panchala, Saurashtra, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan first chose Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami to imprint the tilak and *chāndlo* on his forehead. He then took Swami among His paramhansas, saying, 'O sadhus! Look! This is our *tilak*.' Besides the literal meaning, this statement had a greater underlying significance. Therein He conveyed to His paramhansas the glory of Gunātītānand Swami as an unmatched sadhu (ShriHaricharitrachintāmani I: no.183, Dave 2003 IV: 279). In the Shikshāpatri (52), Bhagwān Swāminārāyan enjoins male devotees to imprint the *tilak-chāndlo* and female devotees to imprint a round *chāndlo* of kumkum and forbids widows to imprint any mark (53).

Importance of tilak

The Brahmavaivart Purāna (Brahma Parva 26) cites the importance of tilak:

|| *Snānam dānam tapo homo devatāpitrukarmmachā,
natsarva nishkalam yāti latāte tilakam binā.* ||

– bathing, *hom*, deva and *pitru* rites of puṇā are not fruitful without imprinting tilak. Similarly the Prayog Pārijat says that all auspicious karmas are unfruitful without a tilak:

|| *akrutvā bhālatilakam tasya karma nirarthakam* ||

Scientific reason for tilak on forehead

On first meeting a person, we first see the face, more so the forehead. Tilak on the forehead enhances a person's personality and character. Tilak is a symbol of victory, auspiciousness and Sampradāy.

The spot between the eyebrows is known as *bhramar*. It is the site of *āgnā chakra* or 'third eye'. This is considered as the centre-point of consciousness and meeting point (*milan sthān*) of Bhagwān. The Kath Upanishad (2.3.16) cites that there are 101 nerves (*nādis*) in the heart. The most important, sushumna passes up from the heart to the forehead and into an area in the brain known as the *brahmarandhra*. By

imprinting tilak on the forehead, the *brahmarandhra* remains vigilant on the path of *sāadhanā* and infuses spiritual energy and tranquility in the mind.

The *Brahmapurān* (quoted in Chandrika, Āchārendu p.63) advocates imprinting tilak on twelve parts of the body where reside the following deities: (1) forehead (Keshav), (2) stomach (Nārāyan), (3) heart (Madhav), (4) throat (Govind), (5) right flank (Vishnu), (6) right upper arm (Madhusudan), (7) ears (Trivikram), (8) left flank (Vāman), (9) left upper arm (Shridhar), (10) behind ear (Rishikesh), (11) upper back (Padmanābh), (12) back of neck (Damodar).

Materials for tilak

The most common materials for imprinting tilak are *chandan* (sandalwood paste), *gopichandan* (type of clay obtained from the pond in Dwarkā), *kumkum* (red powder made with turmeric and lemon juice) and *bhasma* or *vibhuti* (ash from a *yagna* fire). The first two are natural coolants and the latter two are natural antiseptics. The name *gopichandan* has an interesting origin. After Shri Krishna's departure, the grief-stricken gopis plunged into a pond in Dwarkā. Therefore the clay from this pond, considered sacred, is known as *gopichandan*.

Cultural traditions

Besides garlanding, Hindu tradition welcomes and felicitates a person by imprinting a tilak on his forehead. It is imprinted when bidding farewell to a person migrating abroad or embarking on a long journey. In ancient times it was imprinted on those going to battle, to boost their valour.

*Urdhvapundram mrudā kuryād bhasmanā tu tripundrakam
ubhayam chandanenaiva abhyangotsavarātrishu
lalāte tilakam krutvā sandhyākarma samācharet
akrutvā bhālatilakam tasya karma nirarthakam*

– Prayogpārijāt

– *urdhvapundra tilak* (by Vaishnavs) can be imprinted with clay or *gopichandan*, *tripundra* (by Shaivites) with *bhasma*. However on *utsav* nights, *chandan* should be applied on the whole body. Without *tilak* any auspicious karma is fruitless.

The *Mahābhārat* cites that women imprinted a red *tilak*, of *kumkum*.

On Bhagwān Sri Krishna's vigraha in Guruvāyur, a kasturi tilak is imprinted on the forehead, every morning (Vaidyanathan 2006:59).

Every Friday in Tirumālā, white earth is used for the Vaishnava tilak mark on Sri Venkateshwar Bālāji's forehead (Krishna 2004:93).

tilak marks



Vaishnava Brahmin
(water colour, 1822)



Shaiva ascetics
(water colour, 1822)

An 11th century sculpture in Bhuvaneshwar, Orissa depicts a woman imprinting a tilak (chāndlo) with the middle finger of her right hand. This method is also enjoined by the Āhanik Sutrāvali.

The Vishnudharmottar Purāna advocates tilak of kumkum in all auspicious (*māṅgalik*) events. However a white tilak of (*gopichandan*) is forbidden in auspicious events.

Effects of tilak

The Brahmand Purāna cites the effects of imprinting tilak with various fingers, while the Āhanik Sutrāvali advocates specific fingers for imprinting tilak on specific occasions:

fingers	effect	used on
angushthā (thumb)	grants power	kings (<i>rajya</i> tilak)
tarjani (forefinger)	grants moksha	<i>pitrus</i>
madhyamikā (middle)	longevity	oneself
anāmikā (third)	begets food	<i>devas</i> and <i>sadhus</i>

However it is important that the substance used for the tilak should not touch the nails of the fingers.

The colours of tilaks depend on the substances used:

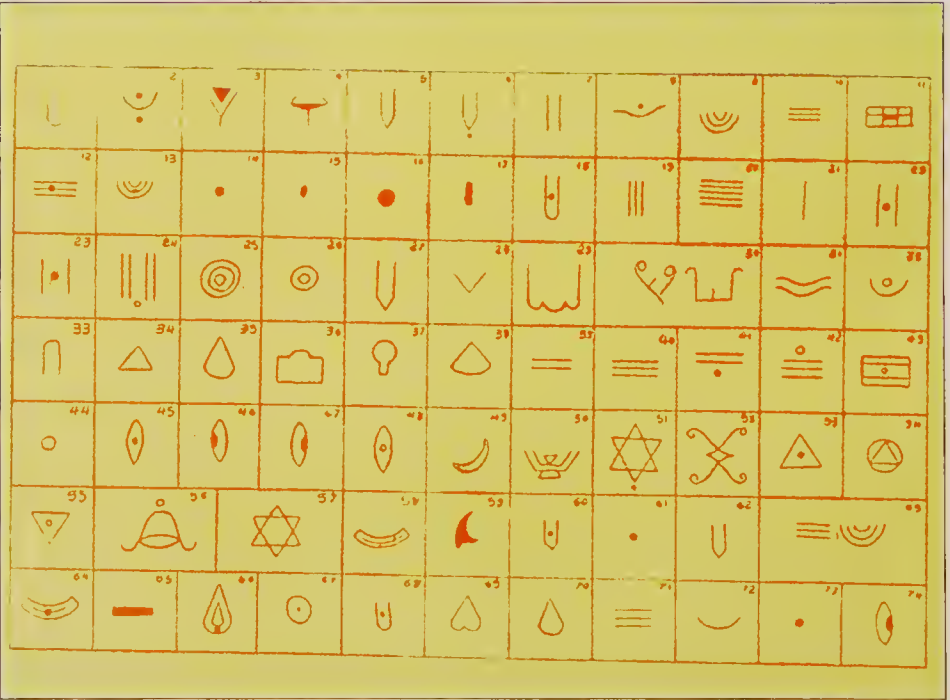
colour of tilak	substance	effect
red	saffron and kumkum	attracts others
red	kumkum	attracts others
yellow	<i>gopichandan</i>	increases wealth
white	sandalwood	confers moksha
black	<i>kasturi</i> (musk)	confers peace

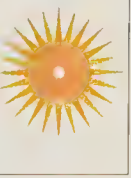


Pramukh Swami Mahārāj imprinting chāndlo on Shri Ganeshji during prāna pratishthā

(Source courtesy: Priyabalaben Shah. Chāndlo – Bindi – Tilaka, 1998).

Types of tilaks (74 of 255)





41. Miscellaneous Symbols

Chakra (चक्र)

Chakra means a wheel or disc. It is also a discus with a hole in the centre used by Nārāyan – Shri Vishnu's four-armed form. It is one of the four objects (*āyudha*) held by him. The other three are *shankh* (conch), *gadā* (mace) and *padma* (lotus). According to the Panchrātra shāstras, the 24 forms of Vishnu are named by the sequence in which the four objects are held.

According to the Vishnu Purāna, the *chakra* symbolises the human mind, whose thoughts, like the *chakra* spin faster than the mightiest wind. Shri Vishnu released it as a weapon to protect his ardent devotee Ambrish Rājā, from sage Durvāsā, who was about to curse him.

During Vishnu's eighth incarnation, as Shri Krishna, the latter's formidable and invincible weapon was the Sudarshan chakra, which he used to behead Shishupal.

It also represents the 'Wheel of Time' – *Kāl chakra* and is used as such a symbol in Hindu mandirs and texts.

The shāstras cite that the sacred pool known as Naimisharanya Kshetra in Uttar Pradesh, was formed when Shri Vishnu released his chakra, which bore down into the earth. This hole then filled with water.

Gadā (गदा)

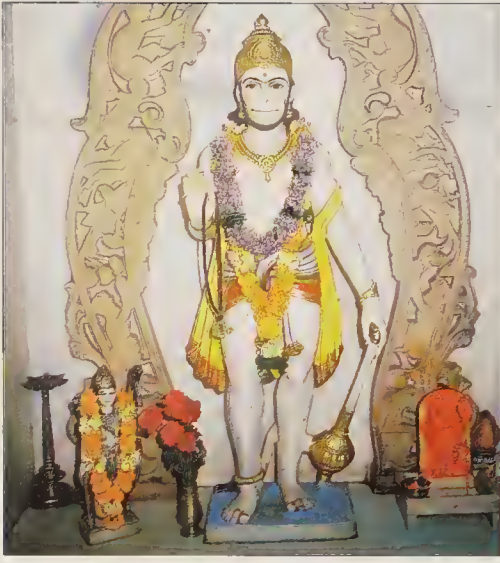
The *gadā* (mace) is the second of the four objects held by Shri Vishnu. He uses it symbolically to protect Creation. The word *gadā* is derived from a demon named *Gadā*. Haughty from his prowess in battle, he wreaked havoc on mankind. He was also famed for his charitable nature, granting whatever was requested of him. To protect mankind from his harassment, Shri Vishnu therefore approached him as a brahmin and requested for his bones. *Gadā* willingly offered them. Out of these, the Ribhus, celestial artists, made an invincible mace, whose name remained *gadā*. Since Shri Vishnu holds the *gadā*, he is also known as *Gadādhara*.

The *gadā* symbolically represents the power of *kāl* – time. Just as the *gadā* is unconquerable, time too, is unconquerable.

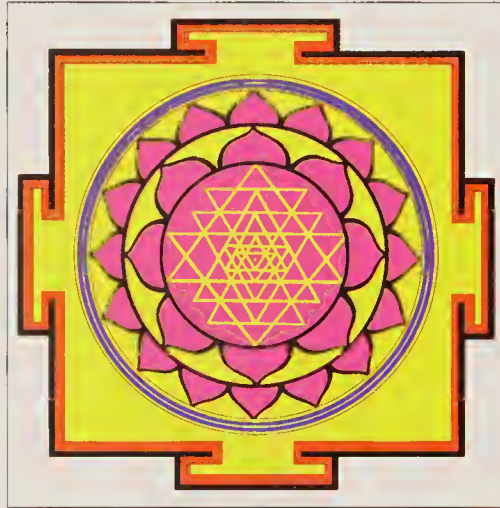


Bhagwān Nārāyan holding four objects (āyudha): chakra, shankh, padma, gadā.

BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Mahelav, Gujarat.



Hanumānji with gadā in his left hand, BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir, Mumbai.



The *gadā* was also used in battles. A famous instance is of the *gadā-yuddha* between Bhim and Duryodhan in the Mahābhārat war.

Hanumānji is also often depicted with a *gadā*, to vanquish evil elements.

In summary, Shri Vishnu himself describes the functions of his four divine objects: ‘The world rests as a lotus in the palm of my hand (*hastāmalakvat*). The universe revolves around my finger like a *chakra*. I blow the music of life through my *shankh* and wield my *gadā* to protect all creatures.’

Yantra (यंत्र)

Yantra literally means an instrument, loom or machine.

A *yantra* is also a mystical geometrical diagram, the energy body of a mantra. Inside its various sections, devas or planets are placed for invocation or *pujan*. The use of such *yantras* evolved because *murtis* could not be made of so many devas. Hence they were symbolised either numerically or by geometrical designs. Heaps of specific grains were also allocated to specific *devas* and placed in the *yantra*. Sometimes only a specific geometrical design designated a specific deva. The origin of *yantras* is rooted in the Agam shāstras, such as the Panchrātra texts. The Agam texts have only *yantras* but no *yagna*. The latter originates in the Vedas, and the *yagna vedi*’s precision geometry is detailed in the Sulba sutras.

Those who could not perform *yagnas*, which meant the majority of the people, could offer *pujā* to the *devas* and planets by using *yantras* and mantras. Over time, though not stipulated in the shāstras, people began to wear metallic bracelets, lockets, etc. of *yantras*.

A side development of the precision geometry of the ancients was the *mandal*. This is a precise geometrical design and shape used in ancient architectural texts known as Shilpa shāstras. *Devas* were invoked in these *mandals* prior to construction, to augur auspiciousness and *shānti*.

The ultimate purpose of a *yantra*, mantra or *yagna* is for man’s beneficence (*shubh*, *māngalya*).

The most common *yantra* is the Shri Yantra.

Shri Yantra (श्रीयंत्र)

The Shri Yantra is a symbolic diagram of cosmogenesis when Shiva and Shakti unite.

Adi Shankarāchārya established the worship (*upāsana*) of Shiva and Shakti using the Shri Yantra, citing it in the Saundaryalahari. The Shri Yantra sacred geometry has three *chakras* (circles) made of 43 triangles, each having its own deity. It is believed that the 43 triangles represent 43 universes. Inside the *yantra*, 4 triangles pointing upwards represent Shiva. Five triangles facing downwards represent Shakti. The three *chakras* represent the three *gunas*; *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The dot in the centre, known as *Mahābindu* represents Parabrahman, the Supreme Reality (Jani 1998:12).

The aim of worshipping the Shri Yantra is for the *jiva* to attain Shiva.

There are three main forms of Shri Yantras:

(1) *Bhu prushtha* – which is two-dimensional and used by some Hindu samnyasis.

(2) *Meru prushtha* – which is 3-d, with outward-facing triangles. This is also used by some Hindu samnyasis.

(3) *Kurma prushtha* (tortoise-shaped) – which is embossed on a metallic plate and used by householders.

The Shri Yantra is also the central object of worship in the 51 Shakti Peethas, the majority located in India and Nepal, and a few in Bangladesh, Tibet and Pakistan.

Sāadhanā using the Shri Yantra is complex and has to be performed under a guru who has a thorough knowledge of Shri Vidya *upāsana* (worship).

Shri (श्री)

The letter श्री (Shri, Sri) denotes the following sacred meanings:

- (1) auspiciousness (*māngalya*)
- (2) Lakshmi – goddess of wealth.
- (3) *aishwarya* – power
- (4) *siddhis* – mystical powers (check)
- (5) *saundarya* – beauty
- (6) Bhagwān's abode
- (7) Aksharbrahman
- (8) Bhagwān. In Sanskrit *Shri* is derived from: *shrayate yā sā shrihi* – one who offers refuge is *Shri*. Since



Lifespan of Shri Yantra

bronze	7 yrs.
silver	22 yrs.
gold	lifespan of the person who has performed its prāna pratishthā
crystal	the whole lineage

One who keeps a Shri Yantra in his *pujā* should always recite the *Khadgamala stotra mantra*. In *Ambāji*, there is no murti but a Yantra of Durga. In the 51 Shakti piths Yantra *pujā* is offered.



rākhi with Shri symbol tied during Rakshā Bandhan



only Bhagwān, the Supreme Reality can offer refuge, *Shri* denotes Bhagwān.

- (9) 'Shri' as prefix before a person's name renders dignity. It is similar to writing 'Mr.' before a name in English.

Shri Savā (श्री११)

This symbolically means, 'let one's wealth multiply one and one-quarter times'. It is written on the first page during *chopadā puja* of account ledgers, on the evening of Diwāli.



Shubh – Lābh (शुभ-लाभ)

Shubh (शुभ) means auspicious. *Lābh* (लाभ) means benefit. These two words are also symbols associated with prosperity and wealth. Merchants write these in their ledgers on Diwāli during the *Chopdā puja* ritual. Therein they pray to Paramātmā that during the coming year, let all income (Lakshmi) be auspicious and turn out to be beneficial or *daivi* – good – rather than *āsuri* – evil. It is also customary during Vāstu Pujā to write (in vernacular) *shubh* and *lābh*, on the left and right walls of the door frames, respectively (see p.187).



*shubh-lābh during Ganesh sthāpan
in vivāh samskāra rituals*



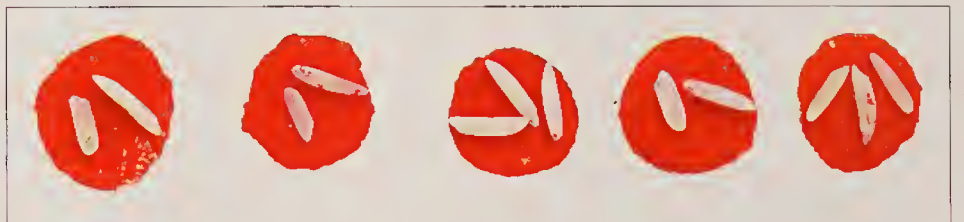
*trishul held by Shiva,
BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir,
Houston.*

Trishul (त्रिशूल)

This is a three-pointed lance, held by Shiva. It is used as a symbol by both the Shaiva and Shākta sampradāyas. It symbolises (1) Satyam (truth) (2) Shivam (liberation) and (3) Sundaram (goodness). It also symbolises the three *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

Five dots

Five dots of kumkum in a straight line are imprinted during pujā rituals, occasionally followed by rice grains. The dots represent the *Panch Mahābhuts* – five elements of earth, water, light, wind and space.



Afterword

Having glimpsed at the rich heritage of Hindu rites and rituals, Hindus of all ages will be inspired to practise them in their daily lives. They will have realised that rituals remove boredom and break monotony in life. They enrich, refine and *samskarise* an individual, remove uncouthness and instill aestheticity. Which individual will not appreciate a refined character, to live a contented life of *shānti*? Living according to the whims of the mind and intellect, to let the senses run riot, leads to discord, misery, insatiable cravings, and discontentment.

Such a state of mind often induces young people to lose their zest for life. This then gradually leads to a host of ills such as inferiority complex, apathy, moodlessness, emptiness, depression, and a lack of clarity of the goal of life, which may lead to psychosomatic ailments such as allergies, headache, backache, migraine, asthma and colitis.

These problems can easily be nipped in the bud by practising certain rituals everyday, which strengthen the mind and *ātmā*. Regularity is the key and a must, just as exercising for muscular fitness. For example, a morning bath itself purifies the body and mind. A few minutes of *prāṇāyāma* invigorates one's *prāṇic* energy in the body which also helps one concentrate in puja and later in school. Then perform morning puja of one's Deity and imprint the tilak mark on the forehead (males). This charges one's spiritual batteries. Then offer *panchāṅg pranāms* to parents and elders before leaving for school. This mellows the heart and one receives their blessings which guarantees success in life.. While travelling to school in a bus or train, one can mentally or softly recite Sanskrit mantras and divine names from the Vishnusahasranām or Janmangal Nāmāvali. Such mantra-chanting boosts the *ātmā* and the body, which can then release the feel good hormone serotonin in the brain. In school, offer *pranāms* to one's teacher/lecturer in addition to a handshake. Initially this may cause a flutter, but stick to it diligently. It will pay off in the long term, with knowledge and pride in belonging to a living tradition over 10,000 years old.

During break, if one can have access to a secluded area of a library, perform *mānsi puja* for a few minutes. In addition to *ātmachintan* and offer *thāl (naivedya)* mentally, one can introspect about the previous lecture as well. Again, this relaxes the mind, beats stress and boosts the *ātmā*. At lunch break, spare a few moments to offer *prārthnā* or chant a Sanskrit shloka before having food. While eating, talk less and remember Bhagwān and one's spiritual guru. The act of eating then becomes a form of bhakti, which also nourishes the *ātmā*. At the end, make sure to ritually clean one's mouth by sipping some water.

At home, after showering and wearing a washed set of unworn clothes, one can perform the evening *ārti* in the home shrine. Follow this up by offering the evening meal as *naivedya* to Bhagwān. Only then have this *prasādam*. By these two rituals, one can experience spiritual fulfillment. Then spare about 10-15 minutes for *ghar satsang*, in which all family members meet, to read and discuss a shloka or paragraph from a sacred text. These golden minutes strengthen family unity and love.

Finally, before sleep, one may offer *mānsi puja*, *prārthnā* and do a few *japa mālās*, to thank Bhagwān for the smooth workings of the day and to evoke divine dreams. These few rituals before sleep may be regarded as powerful stress busters rather than chores. They connect one to the Divine during sleep and prevent bad dreams, which would otherwise disturb both the mind and body. This leaves one stressed the next day. In case of a horrible dream, there is succour for this too; by *prārthnā* or performing *prāyashchitta* (atonement) in the form of *japa mālās*.

At times, one experiences an 'air gap', a 'free fall', in which one has no control over one's thoughts, apathy or moodlessness. During this phase, the most sure-fire solution to spiritually charged oneself instantly, is *navdhā bhakti* – any one of the nine forms of devotion (Ch.12). This acts like an intravenous electrolyte solution infused in a person sapped by dehydration. This is Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's sage advice in Vachanāmrut Gadhadā II-63.

Also learning to cook the mouth-watering vegetarian recipes in appendix 5 will be an extremely beneficial asset,

Daily Hindu rituals function in much the same way as spices season (vaghār) vegetables or curry. There are a fixed number of spices, each with its unique property, of being a carminative, digestive, antiflatulent, inducing secretion of enzymes, and so on. Similarly one ritual may purify the body, a second boosts the ātmā, a third calms the passions, a fourth may fibrillate a 'dead', moodless mind into action, a fifth shortens the ego, a sixth kicks out māyic pollutants and a seventh connects directly to the high voltage power station – Paramātmā. The result? An instantaneous power surge into the body, mind and ātmā!

both in the short and long term. Cooking is a vitally important life-saving skill, which determines one's physical, mental and spiritual constitution. More important, is that one is also able to channel this to a devotional pursuit, by offering food that one has personally cooked, to Bhagwān in the home shrine.

In this manner, one can easily incorporate rituals in one's daily life. During vacation and sacred days and months, one can devote extra time to practice other rituals and *vrats*. Try to observe the Ekādashi fasts twice a month, preferably without having even *farāri* foods. This purifies the mind and body, as well as strengthens one's *ātmā*.

Sanātan Dharma's rites and rituals help young people easily grasp the concept of being *ātmā* and not the body. In addition to developing such *ātmanishthā*, rituals can broaden the vision of young Hindus, about ancient Vedic traditions and what being Hindu is all about. Rituals teach them about how they can refine their daily lives to develop aestheticity and character. These boost self-esteem and harmonise life at home and within the community.

Rituals also wonderfully inspire the young; to develop the spirit of tolerance and selfless service to society, to increase faith in Paramātmā and respect His creation, especially all forms of life. This will help them understand how the law of karma works and how it affects their own lives. This will inspire them about developing a deeper respect for *ahimsā* and vegetarian ideals. Finally, Hindu rituals will inspire young Hindus to connect with Paramātmā and increase devotion – *bhakti* – to Him with the guidance of a spiritual guru who has realised Him. This will gradually lead to inner enlightenment and fulfillment.



following pages: artist's impression
of Hindu rituals in daily life
(courtesy: Sadhu Narayanprasaddas)





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Introduction

The FAQs in Appendix 1 – concern Hindu rituals, but for lack of space, could not be discussed in any of the five main sections, and are yet important enough to be discussed.

Appendix 2 – lists a table of sacred plants and trees commonly used in Hindu rituals.

Appendix 3 – overviews the daily rituals of BAPS Swāminārāyan followers.

Appendix 4 – briefly discusses the sadhu tradition in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya.

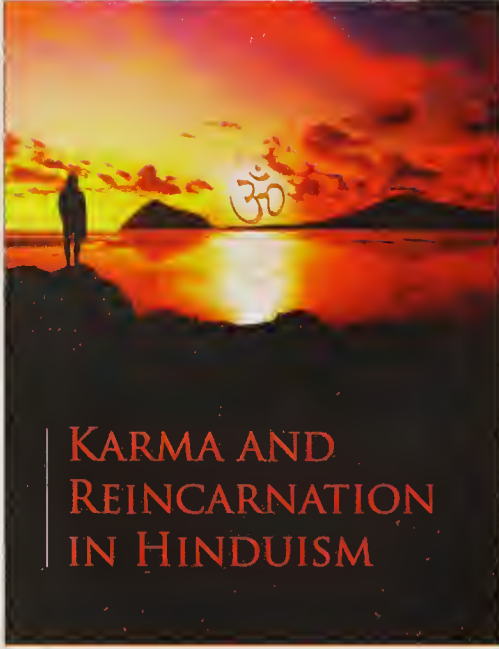
Appendix 5 – is a must for all Hindu students studying away from home. It includes healthy, delicious and satiating vegetarian dishes which can be cooked easily. It includes important Ayurvedic health principles in choosing and avoiding certain foods due to their inherent (unhealthy) attributes, which people are unaware of.

Students suffering from some common disorders are offered a cautionary note, to prevent needless suffering caused by certain foods. Six new food dishes have now been added. Though the bhajiyā and *vadā* of potato and parched rice take longer to cook, compared to the original 20 minute recipes, these have been included now because of their popularity, taste and satiating virtues and for those students who may have spare time to treat themselves on weekends.

Appendix 6 – photographically illustrates *farāri* foods – those which are edible on Ekādashi.

Appendix 7 – lists nine reasons offered by Sanjeev Kapoor, India's most popular chef, about why Gujarati food is awesome.

Miscellaneous FAQs



for details of Karma and rebirth see
the author's book: *Karma and
Reincarnation in Hinduism*,
Swaminarayan Aksharapith © 2009

1. What are the fundamental principles of Sanātan Dharma?

There are four principles of Sanātan Dharma:

1. *Avatārvād* : Manifestation of Paramātmā on earth. Paramātmā Himself incarnates on earth in various forms to establish dharma and grant liberation.

2. *Murti Pujā* : Worship of Paramātmā's *murtis* (images) and His different *avatārs*. Consecrated *murtis* are worshipped as the living form of Paramātmā. The *murtis* help devotees strengthen their devotion to and faith in Paramātmā.

3. Law of Karma : Karma means action. Every act or thought is a karma. Good deeds result in good fruits; bad acts result in bad fruits. An individual is responsible for his actions whose fruits are given by Paramātmā. There is no fatalism involved.

4. *Punarjanma* (rebirth) : Our *jīvātmās* are born and reborn in one of the 8,400,000 species until we attain moksha.

2. How should one do darshan in a mandir?

Bhagwān Swāminārāyan describes how to do Bhagwān's darshan in Vachanāmṛt Sārangpur 2. He says that he is pleased on devotees who do darshan in the following manner:

(1) by concentrating one's attention totally on Bhagwān, but not looking at other objects which may accidentally come in the way, such as a bird or an animal.

(2) by doing darshan as if it is the first occasion, with immense, divine *bhāṇ* and *mahimā*.

(3) then record this darshan in one's heart and visualise it again and again. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan then gives the ideal example of Queen-mother Kushalkunverbāi of Dharampur. She did his darshan in this manner.

(4) To remember this darshan everyday.

One should not do darshan hurriedly, without remembering Bhagwān's *shanagār* – garments, ornaments, garlands, etc.

Ten practical tips for better darshan

(1) Begin darshan by observing the *shanagār* on the head. What is the name of the adornment? Is it a *pāgh* or *sāfo* or *mugat*? Is there a *chhoglu* on the *pāgh/sāfo*? Are there *torās* of beads hanging from the *pāgh/sāfo*? Is there a *kalgī* (feather) and pendant inserted in the *sāfo*? What is the shape of the pendant? It's often a peacock.



Bhagwān Shri Swāminārāyan,
central shrine, BAPS Shri
Swāminārāyan Mandir, London.

(2) Then take one's *drashti* (vision) downwards, to the ears, eyes, cheeks, neck, upper and lower half of the body, hands, ankles and lotus-feet. What shape are the *kundal* on the ears? Fish (*meen*), peacock (*mayur*), crocodile (*makar*), or simple ear-rings.

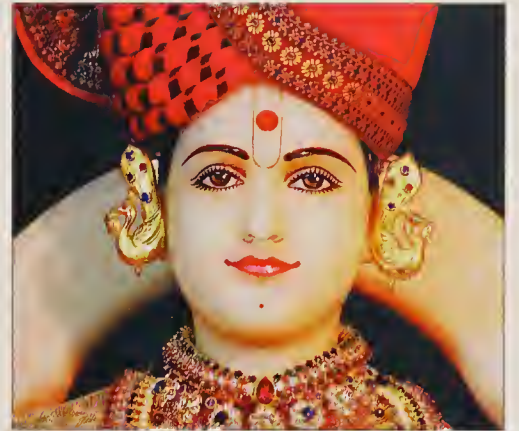
(3) Names of the appropriate ornaments should come to mind while doing darshan of each part. One should whisper the name to oneself. This helps in recalling the *shanagār* later.

Names of ornaments : *kanthalo* (around the neck), *hār* (garland/necklace), *kadā* (locket around the wrist), *ponchi* (on the palms), *vedh viti* (gem-studded rings on the fingers), *kandoro* (chain ornament at the waist), *todā* (around the ankles), *zānzar* (decorative chain on the ankles), *nang* (gems on each toe), *chhadī* (decorative gold or silver stick).

Names of garments: *jāmo*, *kediyu*, *khes* or *dopatto*, *surwāl*, *dhotiyu*.

(4) Examine the texture, colour, folds, pleats and pattern of the garments. One can recognise velvet and yellow silk (*pitāambar*) easily. Often, the *pujāri* sadhus may choose a particular colour theme for the *shanagār*. For example the *khes*, handkerchief and ear-rings may be of the same colour to match that of the garments. Or are they in contrasting hues?

(5) Examine the *mukhārvind* (lotus-face), *netra kamal* (lotus-eyes), the nose, *ausht kamal* (lotus-lips) and the slight smile, the attractive *tibakdi* (black mole) on the right cheek, *hastakamal* (lotus-hands), *charankamal* (lotus-feet).



pāgh, peacock-shaped kundals

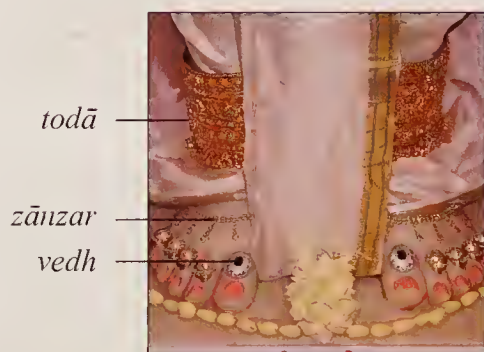




*Shri Ghanshyām Mahārāj,
BAPS Shri Swāminārāyan Mandir,
Atlanta, USA*



kandoro



todā

zānzar

vedh



*Suryadeva, Chandradeva (symbolised
by the deer) and Hanumānji in a
golden simhāsan, BAPS Shri
Swāminārāyan Mandir, Amdavad.*

Observe devotionally and carefully the contours of the fingers and toes, and the pink or reddish nails. What are the *mudrās* of the right and left hands? Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's left hand will have *abhay mudrā*. Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami's will be *jnān mudrā*.

(6) If there is a *mugat* on the head, then ask yourself what *tithi* (day) is it? On Swāminārāyan Jayanti (*sud* 9th), Ekādashi, Punam or Amās *mugats* are adorned. Amās is the darkest and last day of the Hindu lunar month. On this day, a shield, a sword and a dagger are placed at the feet for Bhagwān to symbolically vanquish evil.

(7) Observe the flowers in the garlands. Name the flowers. This will also help one recall the darshan later. In India one can infer the season from the flowers: roses in winter and spring, *mogaro*, *dolar* (jasmine species), *guldāvadi* (chrysanthemum) and *hajāri* (marigold) in the summer. *Mogaro* usually disappears after the rains begin. Roses and *hajāri* occur around Shrāvan. In the mandirs in Europe and USA, one may see red or white carnations in the summer and perhaps a *guchchha* of daffodils and tulips in the spring.

(8) Is there a special *pichhvai* (curtain) behind the *murtis*? If there is no *pichhvai*, try to discern the different shapes carved in the golden *simhāsan*; *Suryadeva*, *Chandradev* (as a deer), Hanumānji in flight, etc.

(9) Try to use all the five senses while doing darshan – eyes, ears, touch, smell and taste. Try to identify the fragrance in the *garbha gruha* or mandir. Is the incense (*agarbatti*) of sandalwood or *mogaro* or rose? In some shrines, *lobān* or guggul is used instead of incense sticks. After *ārti*, smell the burnt ghee of the *divās*. In May-June in India, the exquisite fragrance of *chandan* adornments pervades Vaishnava mandirs. In south India, the usual fragrance of the *garbha gruha* is a mixture of ghee, coconut and camphor water. As for taste, each sampradāya or *tirth* has its own unique *prasādam* as well (see Ch.7).

Such darshan using all the five senses soothes and boosts one's body, mind and ātmā!

3. Why is Ganesh offered puja first in any Hindu ritual and venture?

Ganeshji (Ganpatiji) is the deity of *māngalya* – auspiciousness. He is invoked for the success of all ventures and projects. He is *vignahartā* – remover of potential obstacles. He is invoked by chanting:

*Vakratund mahākāya surya koti samaprabhaha
nirvighnam kuru mey deva sarva kāryeshu sarvadā*

– O One with a curved trunk, large body, brightness equal to crores of suns, always remove obstacles from all my endeavours.

Shiva granted Ganeshji a boon that he would be invoked by people before embarking upon any project (ref. details in *Hindu Festivals – Origin, Sentiments & Rituals*, Swāminārāyan Aksharpith, 2005).

4. Why is durvā offered to Ganeshji?

Durvā is a type of common grass (*Cynodon dactylon*). It is offered to Ganeshji during puja. This instantly pleases him. The following mantra is chanted when offering *durvā*:

*Durvā...kashan suharitānamrutān mangalapradān
ānitānstana pujārtham gruhāna Ganānāyaka.*

Nityakarma Pujāprakāśh

– O Ganeshji, kindly accept and grace this fresh *durvā* which is auspicious and equivalent to amrut.

Durvā is liked by Ganeshji after the following event. A demon named Anulāsura was harassing rishis and people. After a plea from the deities, Ganeshji vanquished and swallowed him. However this induced a burning sensation in his stomach. To treat it, Kashyap rishi gave him a knot of 21 *durvā* stalks. This calmed the burning.

Durvā is used in Ayurveda to calm nerves and for mental peace. It also soothes burning in other parts of the body.

On Bhadarva *sud* 8, Hindu women observe the *vrat* of *Durvashtami* for the longevity of their offspring. They offer *pujan* to a bundle of *durvā* and fast on this day.

5. Why are tulsi, bili (bael) and ākado offered to Vishnu, Shiva and Hanumānji, respectively?

Since Vishnu is a *sāttvic* deva, he prefers *sāttvic* puja *dravyas* such as: white woollen āsana, tulsi *mālā* and tulsi leaves (*Ocimum sanctum*), lotus, kumkum and white *chandan*.



Ganesh puja at the beginning of vivāh rites



durvā grass offered to Ganeshji



durvā



ākado



tulsi



bili



It is customary for Hindu women to offer puja to tulsi in the evening, by lighting a divo near a tulsi plant. By this, they attain blessings of Vrundā (Lakshmi), as well as Bhagwān Vishnu.



tulsi with Mathurā pendā offerings

Shiva is often offered worship to grant longevity, since he is the deva who offers protection from Kāl. For longevity, the shāstras advocate *bili patra* (*Aegle marmelos*), *dhatūrā* (*Datura stramonium*), *rudrāksh mālā* (*Elaeocarpus ganitrus*) and the *Tryambakam* mantra.

Hanumānji represents *dāsatva* – ideal servitude. He is the ideal servant – *bhakta* of Shri Rāma. Shri Rāma was offered the usual fragrant and beautiful flowers by devotees. Hence as ideal *sevak*, Hanumānji's lofty bhakti ideal dictates not to accept anything which was offered to Shri Rāma. The flower and plant that people avoided was the poisonous white *ākado* (*Calotropis gigantea*). Hence its white flowers and flower *mālā* are usually offered to Hanumānji.

6. Why is tulsi sacred?

- In her previous birth, Tulsi, as Vrundā was married to a demon named Jalandhar. To vanquish him, Vishnu tricked Vrundā and destroyed Jālandhar. She cursed Vishnu that he would turn into stone (*shāligrām*). In turn, Vishnu accepted the curse and blessed her that she would forever be near him, and would be offered worship along with him. Therefore Vishnu accepts only that offering on which a tulsi leaf is placed. Since then tulsi plants also grow on the banks of the river Kālī Gandaki, where *shāligrām* stones occur naturally (see p.268).
- 'Shri Hari adorns wreaths of tulsi leaves and also greatly adores its fragrance. Seeing this, flowers such as mandār, pārijāt, jāsmine, champak, karavir, punnāga, nāgkesar, bakul, lotus, though themselves fragrant, highly regard tulsi; that she performed greater penance (in her previous birth) than any of them' (Bhāgvatam 3/15/19).
- A Sanskrit *shlok* describes tulsi's sanctity:

Yanmule sarvatirthāni yannagre sarvadevatāhā,
yanmadhye sarvavedāscha tulasi tām namāmyaham.

– I bow to the tulsi, at whose base reside all tirths, at whose top reside all deities and in whose middle are all the Vedas.

- The Brahmaivaivart Purāna (Prakritikhand 21/40) lauds tulsi's glory:

Sudhāghatasahasrena sā tushtirna bhavedwārehe,
yā cha tushtirbhanevenrunām tulasipatra dānatah.

– He (Bhagwān) is not so pleased after bathing with a thousand pots of amrut, as he is when he is offered even a single tulsi leaf.

- In Vaishnavism, it is obligatory to place a tulsi leaf when offering *bhog* (food) and donation.
- A special *utsav* – the Tulsi Vivāh, is also observed in all Vaishnava mandirs, when Tulsi is married to Vishnu, with pomp and bhakti.
- It is also a ritual to place a tulsi leaf in the mouth of a person, as the first *antyeshti* rite at the time of death. This ensures his transmigration to Vishnu’s abode.
- In Ayurveda, tulsi is considered a *divya aushadhi* – divine herb. As such it is used to treat many ailments.

7. Why is the peepal tree sacred?

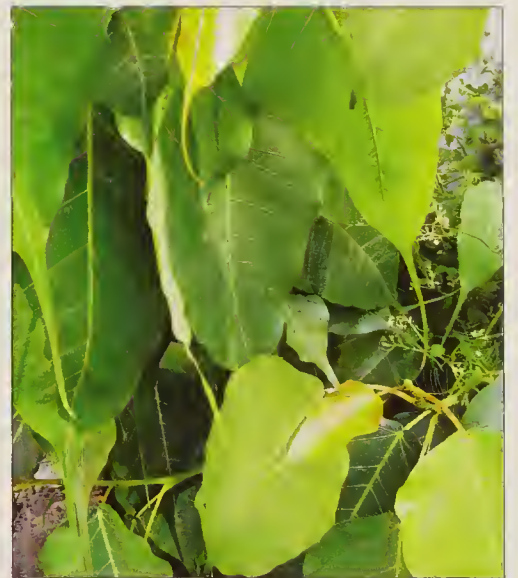
There are several references in the shāstras about the sanctity of the peepal tree (*Ficus religiosa*).

1. In the Gitā (10/26) Shri Krishna says, ‘among all the trees I am the peepal tree,’ meaning that it is most sacred: *Ashwatthah sarvavrukshānām*.
2. The Skand Purāna (Nagar, 247/41-44), says: ‘Vishnu resides in the root of the peepal tree, Keshav (Krishna) in the trunk, Nārāyan in the branches, Bhagwān Hari in the leaves and, all the deities in the fruits. This tree is like Vishnu’s *murti*. This tree is full of virtues and has the ability to fulfill desires and remove sins of people.’
3. The Padma Purāna says it is one of Vishnu’s forms. On several occasions during the year, the tree is offered *pujā*. On Somvati Amās – when Amās occurs on a Monday (*Somvār*), it is believed that Vishnu and Lakshmiji reside in the peepal tree.
4. In the Taittiriya Samhitā, it is considered one of the seven most important trees in the world. The Brahmapurāna also echoes this.
5. It is believed that all *tirths* reside in the tree. For those unable to perform a pilgrimage, they can offer the equivalent *pujā* to the tree.

Tulsi’s meaningful names:

<i>tulsi</i>	– matchless
<i>surasā</i>	– with best juice
<i>grāmyā</i>	– available in villages
<i>sulabhā</i>	– easily available
<i>bahu-manjari</i>	– with plenty of flowers
<i>apetā-rākshasi</i>	– by its sight demonical diseases (sins) run away
<i>deva-dundubhi</i>	– inducing joy among the devas
<i>sulaghni</i>	– painkiller

Tulsi wood is used to make kanthis (see p.276) and mālās (see p.244, 245).



leaves of peepal tree



women performing puja of the
peepal tree

Recently researchers have discovered that the peepal tree gives off oxygen not only during the day as trees usually do, but during the night as well.

Shami tree
Gujarati – samdo, khijdo
Latin – *Prosopis spicigera*



Shami puja, in the Yagnapurush
Smruti mandir, Sārangpur,
Saurashtra. This tree was sanctified
by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan.

Pujā ritual

In India, a small circular *otlo* (paving) is usually made around the trunk to enable people to circumambulate it; to acquire longevity. It is believed that childless women who offer water and puja (with kumkum, etc.) will be blessed with offspring. On Somvati Amās, they light a *divo* at root of the tree. Then with a ball of thread, they perform 108 *pradakshinās*, tying the thread around it at the same time.

The following shloka is chanted during the puja ritual:

*Mulato Brahmārupāya madhyato Vishnurupine
agratah Shivarupāya ashvatthāya namonamaha.*

– Prāchin Vratrāj (p.532)

– O Ashwattha! In your roots resides Brahmā, the middle is Vishnu's form and the top is Shiva's form. I bow to you repeatedly.

The Padma Purāna (Shruti Khand 42) cites that by performing *japa*, *homa*, chanting *stotras* and reciting mantras by sitting next to a peepal tree, one accrues fruits one crore fold.

8. Why is the shami tree sacred?

A shlok cites the *shami* tree's sacredness:

*Shami shamayate pāpam, shami shatrum vināshanam
Arjunasya dhanurdhāri, Rāmasya priyavādanam.*

– the *shami* destroys sins and enemies. From its wood, Arjuna made his bow and arrows and it is adored by Shri Rāma.

The *shami* tree attained auspiciousness in the following two ways:

*Shami shamayate pāpam shami lohitakantakā
Dharitrayarjunavānānām Rāmasya priyavādini*

– offering affectionate sentiments to Shri Rāma when he was searching for Sitāji, the *shami* tree attained his favour. It is the destroyer of sins.

When the Pāndavas were in Virat rājā's kingdom, Arjuna hid his weapons on a *shami* tree. Later he collected them from the tree, to battle with Duryodhan in order to retrieve Virat Rājā's cows from him.

The *shami* is offered puja on Dasherā (Aso sud 10).

9. What is the importance of rudrāksh?

The Rudrāksha Upanishad cites details of rudrāksh and its glory. The most common species of the tree is *Elaeocarpus ganitrus*. Other related species are *E. Horibundus* and *E. grandis*. There are 120 species of which 25 flourish in India. The trees commonly flourish in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sumatra, Java and the Pacific Islands. Of the 25 species, those in Nepal are regarded as superior. In Ayurveda, rudrāksh is used in treating colds, hypertension, epilepsy and mental disorders.

Origin

There are two versions of rudrāksh's origin:

(1) The demon Tripura was harassing devas and rishis. Once they requested Shiva for succour. After destroying Tripura, Shiva closed his eyes for a thousand years. Tears trickled from his eyes and fell on earth. From these sprouted rudrāksh trees. Hence arose the Sanskrit meaning of rudrāksh – 'Rudra's eyes' – *rudrasya nayanād utpannā rudrākshāh*.

(2) Another account cites that at the time of dissolution (*pralaya*), Sadāshiva (Shiva) destroyed the world with his 'third' eye (on the forehead). After closing this eye, rudrāksh emanated from it (Sālagrama-Kosha 1996 II: 218).

Uses

Mālās and *bājubandhs* (worn around the arms) are made with *rudrāksh* berries. One berry of the rare and expensive type having one-mukha or 21-mukha may be threaded and worn around the neck. Rudrāksh are purified before use by first washing with coconut water, then milk, ghee, yogurt and finally water. Before stringing them, specific mantras are recited and the berries consecrated. The *mālās* are usually used or worn by Shaiva devotees and for adorning on Shivalings and images of Shiva.

The Rudrāksh Upanishad stipulates diet purity for the person who wears rudrāksh. He has to avoid liquor, flesh, garlic and onion. Wearing the various types of rudrāksh confers different virtues and health benefits in a person. It removes *pāp* (sin) during inauspicious cosmic events such as: *grahan* (eclipse), *vishuva* (equinox), *ayana* (motion of the planets) and *sankrānti* (the apparent changing over of the sun's motion from one tropic to the next).



Types of Rudrāksh

Rudrāksh berries are round or oval in shape. They have longitudinal grooves which are referred to as 'faces' (*mukha*). For example, if there are five grooves then the berry is known as *panch-mukhi*. There are 21 types of berries ranging from grooveless to 21 mukhis. Both the first and the last are rare. Each type represents a specific deva. One-faced: is for Bhagwān. Two-faced: Ardhanārishwar form of Shiva also known as Hara-Gauri. Eleven-faced: 11 forms of Rudra. Twelve-faced: 12 forms of Vishnu or āditya. The small, hard, well-grooved and with a natural hole in the centre is considered especially sacred. A good berry will sink in water. Old, worn out or imitations will float.



rudrāksh mālā



shrifal with sākar offered on Purnimā

The bottom of a berry represents Brahmā, the central canal – Vishnu, the faces – Rudra and the hole – all the devas.

10. Why do Hindus offer coconuts in rituals?

The coconut (Guj. – *nāriyel*, San. – *nārikel*) is used as an auspicious *pujā* offering. It has several virtues and underlying sentiments.

- Its important virtue is that the coconut tree takes in salty water and gives sweet and nutritious water through the fruit. Similarly, man is inspired to mould himself by eradicating his ‘saltish’ *swabhāvas* and to become sweet within.
- In ancient times, Vishvamitra rishi created the coconut, to be used as an offering to appease the deities to halt animal sacrifice. In this manner the rishis propounded *ahimsā* during ritual offerings.
- Since then the coconut has become a symbol of sacrifice. Therefore in any auspicious venture or ritual, a person offers a coconut to a deity with the sentiment, ‘I offer myself at your feet’.
- A Sanskrit *shlok* offers a moral comparing a coconut which is hard externally and soft internally, with a *ber* (*Zizifus jujuba*), which is soft externally, with a hard pit at the centre.

*Nārikelasamākārā drushyante-pi hi sajjanāhā,
anye badarikākārā bahireva manoharāhā.*

– pious people are like the coconut. Others, like the *ber*, only look beautiful.

- It is offered to a deity on certain lunar *tithis* such as Purnimā and Ekādashi, often with a small packet of *sākar* (sugar crystals) and 1.25 rupees in coin form. In some mandirs and sampradāyas, the *pujāri* cracks the coconut and offers one piece to the deity and returns the other piece to the devotee as *prasādam*. It is commonly offered to Hanumānji on Saturdays.
- It is placed on top of a *kalash*, with mango or betel vine leaves during *kalash sthāpan* in *pujā* rituals.
- Coconut water is also used during abhishek in some south Indian temples.
- It is cracked on the doorstep of a new building during *Vāstu pujā* (see p.185) and during *pujan* of new



coconuts offered to deities during auspicious tithis such as Ekādashi & Purnimā

heavy machinery. This is after performing *pujan* of Thākorji and imprinting red *chāndlo* on the *shrifal*, while chanting *shantipaath* and other Vedic mantras and shloks. The milk from the cracked *shrifal* is then sprinkled inside, as well as on those present, to confer purity and auspiciousness.

- During a marriage proposal, it is sent by the girl's parents to the proposed groom. If he accepts it, then the engagement is fixed. This is known as 'having accepted the *nāriyel*'.
- All parts of the coconut and tree are useful, to make: thatch roof, mats, stick brooms, screens, coir rope and edible oil. The soft or dried flesh is often sliced into chips and offered with *sākar* as *prasādam* (see p.35).
- Since its multiple use begats wealth, it is also known as *Shri-fal*. 'Shri' means wealth, *fal* – fruit.
- It is also tied to a bier in six places before taking a body for cremation.



coconut cracked during puja of a new earthmover



betelnut used in puja rituals

11. Why is the *sopāri* used in rituals?

Similar to the coconut, the rishis have considered the betelnut (Sans. – *poogifalam*, Guj. – *sopāri*, Lat. – *Areca catechu*) as an auspicious *pujā dravya*.



betelnut tree

*Poogifalam mahādivya nāgvalli daliyutam,
elādi churna samyutam tāmbulam pratigruhyatām.*

– the sopāri is considered auspicious among all fruits, because it is offered (to Bhagwān) with cardamom and betel leaf as *mukhwās* (during puṇjā).

Any avatār or deity, especially Ganapati, is invoked in the sopāri during any puṇjā ritual. It serves as a murti. When a shrifal is not available, a sopāri serves equally. Any puṇjā or *karmakāṇḁ* ritual would not be possible without one or more sopāris.

- It is a custom to offer jaggery and fragrant sopāri shavings to the women who have arrived to participate in the *pithi cholvi* rite prior to *vivāh*. Seven *sopāris* are also used in the *saptapadi* rite during *vivāh*, each sopāri representing one step (see p.310).
- Ayurvedic texts also prescribe its use in treating ailments.

12. Why is the cow offered puṇjan?

It is offered puṇjan because it is regarded sacred as proclaimed in the *shāstras*:

- The Rig Veda (8/101/15-16) lauds the cow as mother of Rudras, daughter of Vasus, sister of Adityas, centre of *amrut* and it cannot be slaughtered. It is innocent. It is itself Aditi (mother of the devas) and a devi.
- It represents mother earth – *pruthvi mātā* – the supporter of all life.
- By offering puṇjan to the cow, it is believed that 330 million devas and all *tirths* which reside in the cow, are venerated simultaneously.
- It appeared as the divine *Kāmdhenu* during the *Samudra Manthan* – churning of the ocean of milk.
- It is revered and adored by avatārs and deities such as Shiva (as Nandi), Bhagwān Shri Rāma and Bhagwān Shri Krishna. Bhagwān Swāminārāyan performed cow puṇjan on sacred days such as *Kapilā Chhath*.
- Its most important contribution to the agricultural-based life of the people in India, is its offspring – the bullock (ox). This is the most reliable animal to plough land and helps in other ways on the land, such



cow puṇjan as part of antyeshti & sajjā rites

as pulling water out of wells and thrashing harvested crops.

- Its five products – *panchgavya* – namely, milk, yogurt, ghee, urine and dung are all useful in daily life. Milk, yogurt, and ghee, with *sākar* and honey, are used as *panchāmrut* in *pujā* rituals (see p.32), *ārti* and *abhishek*. Ghee and dung cakes are offered as oblations in the *yagna* fire to please the *devas*. The smoke from burnt ghee and dung cakes also purify the vicinity of the *yagna*.
- Cow's ghee is so auspicious that prior to *prāna pratishthā* of a *murti*, it is immersed in ghee (*ghrutādhivās*) as part of the purificatory rites undergone by the *murti* (see p.16).



cow puja & ārti during
Mattu Pongal festival, south India



pujan of oxen during Podo festival on
Shrāvan vad 15 in Maharashtra

13. Why do sadhus and samnyāsis beg alms (bhikshā)?

The Dharmashastras glorify food obtained by *bhikshā*, considering it to be pure (Manu Smruti 2/189, Baudhāyan Dharma Sutra I.5.56 and Yājñavalkya Smruti 1.187). They further declare that food obtained by begging is equivalent to observing *upavās* (Manu Smruti 2/188, Bruhat Parāshar p.130). Begging for *bhikshā* also ingrains two virtues; of humility and the constant awareness in the ascetic, that he has a debt to repay, for being sustained by society (*gruhasths*).

14. Why do sadhus wear saffron robes?

In Sanātan Dharma, there is a lofty significance for ascetics and sadhus wearing saffron-coloured (*bhagvo*) robes. This colour is similar to the colour of fire. Fire has two important qualities: (1) It purifies things. (2) Whatever object thrown in a fire attains the colour of fire and the fire remains as it is.

From these two qualities arise two sentiments. First, by wearing such robes, sadhus are continually reminded to remain as pure as the fire. Secondly they remain aware that they must not be affected by worldly things.

Thirdly and most importantly, their lives should be like that of fire, to 'burn' or sacrifice their lives as an offering to Bhagwān, just as one offers ghee to Agnideva in a *yagna* fire. This 'burning' is symbolic; to live selflessly to serve and help others, so that they too, can purify themselves and overcome *māyā* (worldly things) to attain Bhagwān.



charan sparsh – boy touching a sadhu's foot in reverence.



charan sparsh – devotees touching the feet of sadhus

15. Why do we touch the feet of sadhus?

Touching feet is known as *charan sparsh*. This is Sanātan Dharma's lofty ritual of respect and reverence for sadhus and elders. By their meditation, self discipline, *tapas*, spiritual wisdom and experience, they possess divinity. By *dandvats* or *charan sparsh* we are blessed by them. Their divinity flows into us through their feet, as well as when they touch our heads while giving blessings (*āshirvād*).

Pramukh Swami Mahārāj enjoins children to do *panchāng pranāms*, to their parents and other elders such as grand parents living with them, every morning after one's *nitya puja*. If parents have left for work, then children should do *panchāng pranāms* to them in the evening when they return. This ritual is in accordance with the following Vedic injunctions:

- mātru devo bhava* – venerate one's mother as a deva.
- pitru devo bhava* – venerate one's father as a deva.
- āchārya devo bhava* – venerate one's teacher as a deva.
- guru devo bhava* – venerate one's spiritual guru as a deva.
- atithi devo bhava* – venerate a guest as a deva.

The ritual of *charan sparsh* can be understood scientifically. It is known that the human body is divided into two halves – as experienced at the time of suffering hemiplegia. One half side of the body cannot function, but the other half can. This confirms that there is a positive and a negative energy flowing in right and left side of the body.

This is why when we touch somebody's foot – *charan sparsh*, his positive energy flows into us. The energy circuit is complete when the opposite person blesses us by putting his right hand on our head!

16. How should a student respect his teachers?

The Dharmashastras stipulated codes of conduct for pupils studying at the guru's *āshrama*. These involved *sevā* of the guru, his wife and children, attending the *yagna* fire, cleaning the *āshrama*, looking after the cows and collecting firewood. Today many of these codes are obviously not applicable. However regarding respect for the teacher, the

following codes of conduct are just as applicable for the student, who truly wishes to gain knowledge.

The Gautam and Baudhāyan Dharma sutras (I.2.34, 37) enjoin: the pupil should not sit with his feet on his lap in the teacher's presence, nor stretch out his legs, not to clear his throat loudly, nor to laugh, yawn or crack knuckles. When called by a teacher, he should reply at the first instance by leaving his seat and to approach the teacher, even when called from a distance. The pupil should always sit on a lower level than the teacher. The Manu Smriti (2/199) adds that, the student should not mimic the gait, manner of speech and actions of the teacher. If somebody maligns his teacher, the student should either avoid listening or leave the place (2/200-201). If the pupil himself finds faults in his teacher or maligns him, then he, the pupil, will be born (in his next birth) as an ass or dog. The Vishnudharmottara sutras (28/26) also cite this.

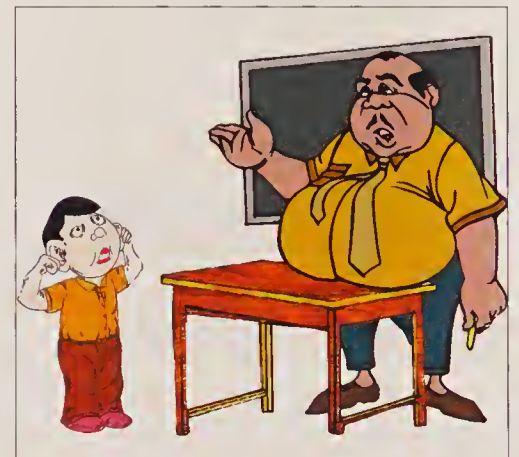
These injunctions have even greater significance today for Hindus living and studying in the West, where the student-teacher decorum is almost non-existent, especially when lecturers in colleges insist on being called by their first names. The Gautam sutras stipulate: that a student is not to pronounce his teacher's name without adding an honourable prefix such as Shri, bhatta or *āchārya*. The equivalent today would be Mr., Mrs., or Dr.. Even the common habit of pupils who mutilate a teacher's surname is absolutely deplorable. This is extremely common and practically the norm in the West. For example, Smith becomes Smithy, Jones – Jonesey. 'Whose class/lecture is it next?' Robo's (Robinson's)!

Finally, the famous injunction known to all Hindu children: *āchāryo devo bhava* – to regard the teacher as a deva. This implies profound respect equivalent to a deva, in the following manner:

- do not crack vulgar jokes about any peculiar mannerisms, minor or major physical abnormalities e.g. a lisp, a beaked nose, a paunch, an odd accent, etc.



Shri Krishna & Sudāmā bringing firewood at guru Sāndipani's āshrama





- do not argue, shout, swear or threaten him/her.
- *āchāryair vivādam na samācharet* (Manu Smṛuti 4/180) – do not debate a subject with him/her, in which one may be more knowledgeable, in a manner that belittles him/her in front of other pupils. In short do not entertain a ‘clever than thou’ attitude. If you have a valid point, discuss it without belittling him/her, or do so in private. By ‘showing off’ in front of others, one loses humility. Knowledge shines only with humility – *vidyā vinayena shobhate*.

17. What is the purpose of a *shikhā* (*choti*)?

The *shikhā* is a tuft of hair on the head (see photo). It is also known as *choti* (Hindi) and *chotli* (Guj.). Like the tilak and *janoi*, it is one of the most prominent, visible features of Sanātān Dharma. Usually a simple knot is tied near its end.

The *śāstras* declare that any religious rite such as a *yagna/homa*, is fruitless without a *shikhā* (Kātyāyan Smṛuti 1/4). It is kept after undergoing *chaul* samskāra (see p.287). When the *gurukul* system of education prevailed, the pupil was eligible to study only after having a *shikhā* and *janoi* (see p.288). It helps one attain self-discipline, since it keeps the *buddhi* (intellect) under control. The *shikhā* helps a person: control his desires, generate noble thoughts, observe dharma, attain wisdom and gain *ātmic* strength.

The *shikhā* is usually kept by Vaishnava sadhus and brahmins, especially those performing *pūjā* rituals. It was also kept by kshatriyas and vaishyas.

Significance of its position on the head

Sushrut rishi, the foremost surgeon of Ayurveda, describes the master sensitive spot on the head as *Adhipati Marma*, where there is a nexus of all nerves, and a joint (Sushrut Samhitā 6/71). The *shikhā* protects this spot. Below this spot, in the brain, occurs the *Brahmarandhra*, where the *sushumnā* (nerve) arrives from the lower part of the body. In Yog, *Brahmarandhra* is the highest, seventh chakra, with the thousand-petalled lotus. It is the centre of wisdom. The knotted *shikhā* helps boost this centre and conserve its subtle energy known as *ojas*.



shikhā of a BAPS Swāminārāyan sadhu



sadhu of the Gaudiya sampradāya with a knot in the *shikhā*

Why should a knot be tied in the shikhā?

The shāstras enjoin this during some rituals:

*Snāne dāne jape home sandhyāyām devatārchane
shikhāgranthi vinā karma na kuryādvai kadāchana.*

(Vārdhul Smṛuti 212, Brahmanityakarmasamuccaya
Prātaḥsandhyā Prayogaha p.13)

– without a knot in the *shikhā*, the following should not be performed: bathing, charity, *japa*, *yagna* and *sandhyā* puṇā. Without a knot, these rituals are not fruitful.

18. Why do we do namaskār instead of shaking hands when we meet somebody?

Namaskār comes from the word *namaha* in Sanskrit, meaning ‘to bow’. During namaskār we press our palms together and then bow our head and upper body to the person we meet. Also known as *pranām*, this is Sanātan Dharma’s lofty ritual of greeting. It naturally makes one humble. And humility has an immensely benevolent effect on the opposite person. It instantly makes him comfortable. He will feel like talking to us. Even if he is egoistic, angry or in a bad mood, he will calm down within moments.

The ancient rishis were experts on human psychology. They advocated this ritual of namaskār because it effectively establishes a rapport with the person opposite. More important is that this method protects us from any undesirable vibrations of the opposite person. It also protects us from any bacteria or viruses stuck on his hands, which would be the case if we shook his hand. This was observed by scientists in the early 1980s at the university of British Columbia, in Canada.

Instead of a handshake, by namaskār one gains respect, humility and health.

What is abhivādan?

Abhivādan is also a form of namaskār, except one utters a sacred mantra or phrase at the same time. For example, people utter such phrases as: ‘Jai Siya Rāma’! ‘Jai Shri Krishna’! ‘Jai Swāminārāyan’! ‘Jai Ambe’! ‘Jai Julelal’! (to Sindhis).



*Pramukh Swami Mahārāj and the
President of India,
Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, offering
pranāms to each other during the
inauguration of Swāminārāyan
Akshardhām, New Delhi
(5th Nov. 2005).*

19. Why should we not let our feet touch books?

Books represent knowledge. The deity of knowledge is Saraswati. Touching books with feet or kicking somebody's school bag which contains books is considered sinful. It shows disrespect for Saraswati. The bad karma of kicking or nudging a book with the feet results in bad fruit; we do not gain knowledge. Our education suffers. We get less marks in school.

Similarly one should not let feet touch any musical or educational instrument. Hindus respect every object from which knowledge is gained. Children in India respect even new notebooks, pens, pencils, etc. by taking them to their nearest mandir so that the *pujāri* may sanctify them at Bhagwān's feet. If one's feet accidentally touch a book or even a person, then one should mentally pray for forgiveness, as well as ritually bow down and touch that person's feet as a gesture of regret and also ask him to pardon one. Such humility develops one's character immensely. Additionally, knowledge becomes useful for only he who is humble, according to the Sanskrit sutra; *vidyā vinayena shobhate*.

The shāstras also forbid touching the following with one's feet: cosmetic pastes, bathing water, excreted matter, blood, mucous, spit and vomited food (lying on the ground).

20. Why don't we blow out candles and cut cakes during birthdays?

Sanātan Dharma's beliefs and rituals are based on enlightening the *ātmā*, about itself and about Paramātmā. These beliefs consolidate *ātmanishthā* rather than boost *dehabhāv* – body consciousness. *Dehabhāv* is a form of ignorance, known as *avidyā-māyā*.

Bearing these basic principles in mind, the rishis prescribed rituals in the daily lives of people. There is no reference in any shāstra of candle blowing or cutting cakes. These are rituals of the West. Blowing out lighted candles leads to darkness. Hindu *samskruti* believes in lighting *divās* of ghee in front of Paramātmā. Ghee is a pure *pujā dravya*. The symbolism here is of enlightening the *jivātmā*, rather than plunging it into darkness. Similarly, the underlying symbolism of 'cutting' is of promoting *tamas ahamkār*,

meaning *himsā* (violence). This is contrary to Hindu philosophy which promotes love, peace, harmony and brotherhood, not intolerance or violence.

- On many occasions abroad, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj has exhorted devotees to offer sweet foods in *thāl* in their nearest mandir or centre to celebrate birthdays, and offer these as *prasād* to relatives and friends.

The fundamental aim of any Hindu ritual is to offer bhakti to Bhagwān and guru, to strength one's ātmā rather than boosting body-consciousness.

21. What is bhog / thāl?

Thāl can mean three things; (i) the actual metallic plate in which food is offered, (ii) the food (*naivedya*) that is placed in it, and (iii) the collection of bhajans composed by the paramhansas which are sung while offering food in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya. The underlying sentiment in offering *thāl* to Bhagwān is that the devotees request Him to avail it and thereby fulfil their devotional *bhāvnā* (sentiments). The sanctified food is known as *prasādani* or just *prasād* in Gujarati. The word *prasād* also signifies *krupā* – Bhagwān's grace. When devotees have food after it has become *prasād*, they are spiritually boosted.

22. How should Hindus inaugurate a dwelling, instead of cutting a red ribbon?

By untying a knot of a *nādā chhadi* or a chain taped on the doorway. The same symbolism of 'cutting' applies as cited in the answer to Q.20. The subtle symbolism of untying a knot, is that one unties or dissolves 'knots' (*granthis*), before residing in the dwelling. *Granthis* means *vāsanā* – of ego, hate, jealousy, anger, lust, greed and so on. Dissolving *granthis* boosts health and internal *shānti*.

In the BAPS Swāminārāyan sampradāya, sadhus invariably untie a knot of a *nādā chhadi* or a chain during the inauguration of a building.

Everyday in Jagannāth Puri, five bhogs are offered to the deities. Except for the morning offering, all the other four are known as Dhupa.



inauguration of the research centre building at Swāminārāyan Akshardhām, New Delhi, 2005

Appendix – 2

Table of sacred plants and trees and their use in rituals

Common name	Botanical name	Rituals
Asopālav (leaf)	<i>Polyalthea longifolia</i>	hung as toran for auspiciousness (<i>māngalya</i>) in kalash
Banana tree	<i>Musā paradisica</i>	in yagnas for auspiciousness
Banyan (leaf)	<i>Ficus roxburghiana</i>	pujā
betelnut (<i>sopāri</i>)	<i>Areca catechu</i>	pujan, offering with pān
Betel vine (leaf)	<i>Piper betel</i>	in pujā, in kalash, as pān offering
Bili (leaf)	<i>Aegle marmelos</i>	offering on Mahadevji
Dried coconut (<i>shrifal/nāriyel</i>)	<i>Cocos nucifera</i>	pujan, yagna, havan, prasādam, cracking for auspiciousness during Vāstu & gruha pravesha
Darbh (<i>kush</i>) grass	<i>Desmodium bipinnata</i>	shrāddh offering, eclipse
Durvā (<i>dharo</i>)	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	pujan of Ganeshji
Jackfruit (tree) (<i>fanas</i>)	<i>Artocarpus integrifolia</i>	wood used in yagna & doorframes for auspiciousness, in south India
Mango (leaf)	<i>Mangifera indica</i>	hung as toran for auspiciousness, in kalash
Peepal (tree) (<i>Aswattha</i>)	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	pujan, in kalash
Rudrāksh (berry)	<i>Elaeocarpus ganitrus</i>	worn on body parts, mālā
Sandalwood (<i>chandan</i>)	<i>Santahum album</i>	pujan, yagna fire, adornments, kanthi, mālā
Shami (tree) (<i>khijdo</i>)	<i>Prosopis spicigera</i>	pujan
Sugarcane (stalk) (<i>ikshu</i>)	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>	in yagna & vivāh for auspiciousness, pongal
Tulsi-leaf	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	pujā of Vishnu, offering in prasādam by Vaishnavs,
-wood		kanthi, mālā

Appendix – 3

Daily rituals of BAPS Swāminārāyan followers

The rituals of bhakti listed below are generally observed by followers worldwide.

1. Morning bath followed by puṇā.
2. Ārti and thāl in the ghar mandir.
3. Visiting mandir for darshan – time and distance permitting.
4. Midday – offering thāl in the ghar mandir.
5. Visiting mandir for sandhyā ārti or/and ārti and thāl in the ghar mandir.
6. Ghar satsang sabhā after dinner for half an hour or more; reading and discussing sampradāya's literature.
7. Singing nitya cheshtā after the ghar satsang sabhā or before retiring to bed.

Daily satsang

- In all shikharbaddh mandirs, sadhus deliver a discourse (kathā) every morning, which is attended by those devotees whose personal schedules permit it.
- During Dhanurmās (from 15th Dec. to 14th Jan.) devotees visit the shikharbaddh mandir to chant the Swāminārāyan mantra in the form of dhun, every morning after mangalā ārti to Shanagār ārti.

Weekly satsang

Devotees attend their nearest satsang centre/mandir one evening during the week, for a two-hour satsang gathering and on Sunday evenings, generally from 5 to 7 pm. At the end, the whole assembly prays by chanting the Swāminārāyan dhun for: the speedy recuperation of those who are ill, the recently deceased, those afflicted by a natural calamity (if any), and peace and harmony in the country of residence and the world.

Yogiji Mahārāj initiated the Sunday satsang for the whole family, including children. Pramukh Swami Mahārāj initiated the mid-week satsang, one evening from 9.00 to 10.30 p.m, generally for adults.

In addition to being spiritual gatherings assemblies, these also simultaneously consolidate social and cultural ties. This is especially important for people who live in areas with few Hindus.

Appendix – 4

The sadhu tradition in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya

‘There is no greater status than that of the sadhu.’

- Bhagwān Swāminārāyan (Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā II-22).

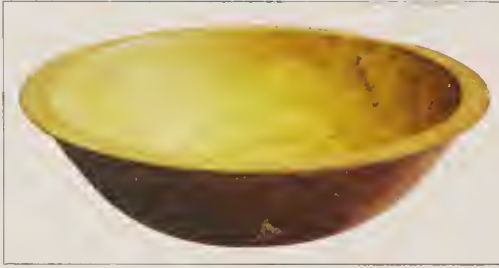
A vibrant legacy flourishing in Sanātan Dharma since time immemorial is asceticism, known as *saṁnyās*.

The Vāsudeva Mahātmya (23.30) of the Skand Purāna cites four types of *saṁnyāsis*; *Kutichak*, *Bahudak*, *Hansa* and *Paramhansa*. These entered *saṁnyās* after fulfilling marriage duties. However there existed another category of ascetics: the *bāl brahmachāri* who renounced home at an early age, rather than enter *vivāh*. For example, Adi Shankarāchārya and Bhagwān Swāminārāyan. In essence, this *samskāra* was ‘*vivāh*’ with the Divine. Continuing this latter tradition, Bhagwān Swāminārāyan introduced the following four types of ascetics in the early 19th century: *paramhansas*, *brahmachāris*, *sadhus* and *pālās* (*pārshads*). All were *bāl brahmachāris* – celibates from birth, except a few *paramhansas*, who joined the sampradāya after renouncing *gruhashth āshrama*.

After Bhagwān Swāminārāyan’s departure, the *paramhansa* tradition ceased. Today, His fifth spiritual successor, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj continues the ascetic tradition, initiating young men who are *bāl brahmachāris* into *sadhus*. Therefore this is not the classical form of *saṁnyās*, rather a special variant in which an individual bypasses the *gruhashth āshrama*, to enter *saṁnyās* straight from the *brahmacharya āshrama*.

The BAPS Swāminārāyan sadhu training centre is based in its Sārangpur mandir, near Botad, housing between 150 to 200 trainee *sadhus*. At the age of 21, a youth becomes eligible to enter a year’s training, as a *sādhak*. During this period he is taught the sampradāya’s *shāstras*, worship and devotional rituals. Simultaneously he strengthens himself through self-discipline, *prāyashchitta*, self-abnegation and austerities. He observes a minimum of five fasts a month, sleeps on the floor, washes utensils, cleans the *āshrama*, chops vegetables for meals and performs similar forms of service, known as *sevā*.

In addition to the *āshrama*’s resident sadhu teachers,



food bowl and water gourd of BAPS sadhus. These are the sacred originals used by Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami (Abhishek Mandapam, BAPS Swāminārāyan Mandir, Amdavad)



BAPS sadhu training centre, Sārangpur, Saurashtra, Gujarat.

Pramukh Swami Mahārāj and senior sadhus (*sadgurus*) regularly offer spiritual discourses and counselling. After training, the *sādhak* obtains written parental consent to become a sadhu. Pramukh Swami Mahārāj then initiates him, along with others in a forthcoming *mahotsav*. During the *dikshā* ritual, he is given *upavit (janoi)* of three strings. Swami anoints his forehead, chest and upper arms with *chandan* and gives him a guru-mantra. Now known as a *pārshad*, he adorns white robes for about one year, during which he undergoes further training. He then receives the *Bhāgvati dikshā* and adorns saffron robes. His new sadhu name ends with *dās*, meaning ‘servant’ of Paramātmā, as a constant reminder to imbibe humility.

As a sadhu, he undergoes a further five-year training program, which now includes cooking and puja of the *murtis* in the *garbha gruha* of the mandir.

Both the *pārshad* and sadhu orders observe the *panch vartmān* stipulated by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan in the Dharmāmṛut. When travelling, both orders do so in pairs, unlike the *samnyāsi* who peregrinates alone.

After completing the five-year training, the sadhus are allocated life-long duties by Pramukh Swami in other mandirs or centres. Those skilled in vocal or instrumental music, writing, or languages such as Sanskrit and Hindi, undergo further training or studies, as the case may be. However, a sadhu’s lifelong *sādhanā* is to strictly observe the *panch vartmāns* and imbibe attributes of *sādhutā* – saintliness. For this the guru, Pramukh Swami Mahārāj remains the ideal.

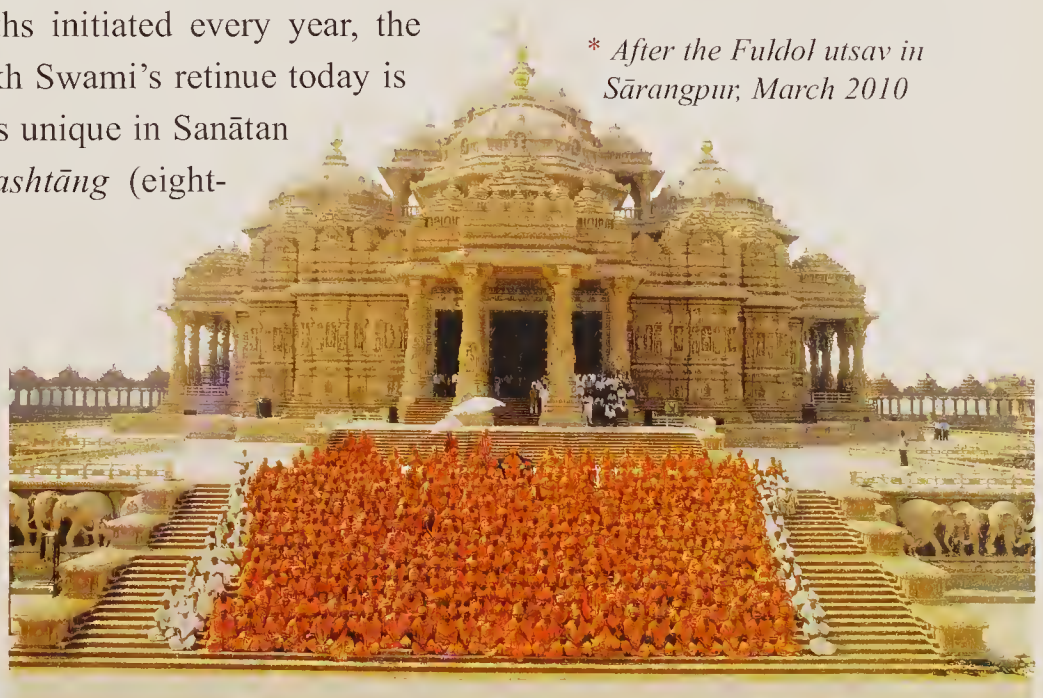
With an average of 30 youths initiated every year, the total number of sadhus in Pramukh Swami’s retinue today is 840*. His order of sadhus remains unique in Sanātān Dharma for its strict vows of *ashtāṅg* (eight-fold) *brahmacharya*.

In the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, when a pārshad (trainee ascetic in white robes) receives dikshā of saffron robes, it is known as Bhāgvati dikshā. This is equivalent to the Vāsudevī dikshā cited in the Bhārdhwāj Samhitā (Ch.2) of the Panchrātra shāstras.

Panch vartmāns of Swāminārāyan sadhus:

1. *nirlobh* – non-avariciousness
2. *nishkāṁ* – non-lust
3. *nis-swād* – non-taste
4. *nis-sneha* – non-attachment
5. *nirmān* – non-ego

** After the Fuldol utsav in Sārangpur, March 2010*



Appendix – 5

Vegetarian delights for students

Diet types

Carnivores: only meat

Omnivores: meat & veg.

Herbivores: only veg.

Ovo-lacto – vegetarians : eggs, dairy & veg.

Lacto – vegetarians : dairy & veg. (Swāminārāyan Hindus)

pure vegetarians (also known as vegans) : only veg.

Fruitarians & strict falāhāri ascetics: only fruits

For Hindu students living away from home, cooking nutritious, scrumptuous and filling meals need not be time consuming. The meals below can be cooked in less than 20 minutes and easily conform to the ideals of *Āhār Shuddhi* discussed in Ch.33. The added benefit, besides being economical, is that salt and fats can be controlled. Another important concept worth considering is that pre-cooked or commercial foods have little *prāna*. Therefore after eating them, a student may experience false yawning, lethargy, drowsiness or moodlessness. These time robbers are a bane in tight academic curriculums.

Exam stress too affects students. Research reveals that they are more prone to illnesses just before exams. During this critical period, healthful and tasty meals combat stress, rather than snacking on junk food, to save time. A satiated stomach and a mind appeased by delicious, nutritious and *sāttvic* foods cooked by the student himself/herself, boosts his/her spirituality and leads to effective stress management.

Minimum utensils:

1. A small (3 litre) steel pressure cooker is preferable. Aluminium vessels react with sour foods.
2. Non-stick vessel for heating liquids.
3. Non-stick pan with handle for roasting *bhākhri* (thick *roti*) and for *vaghār*, warming *dāl*, vegetables, etc.
4. Round steel dish. Serves two purposes: (i) to offer *thāl* (*naivedya*), (ii) inverted – to roll *bhākhri*.
5. Flat rolling pin, rather than the traditional curved one, which needs skill.
6. Frying ladle with holes (*jāro*).
7. Wooden ladle and tablespoon.

Spices needed:

Cloves, cinnamon, *jeerā* (cumin), *rāi* (mustard), *haldi* (turmeric), red chilli powder, *shākh masālā*, *methi* (fenugreek), dry or fresh *dhānā* (coriander) and *limdi* leaves (sweet neem); and ginger root (for *kadhi*). Oil for *vaghār* – of cottonseed, groundnut or sesame seed is preferable (or whatever is available).

Ten golden culinary tips

Since a detailed cooking account is not possible here, a



simplified method of *vaghār* is given on p.424. The amount of water to be used should be learnt from one's mother. *Dāl* (curry) and *chapātis* (*roti*) have purposely been omitted, since they are time consuming. First, browse through the list of vegetable delicacies in the table on p.426. Then read the tips below.

1. The secret of fast cooking, is the pressure cooker. Even for pulao! There's no fuss of stirring, especially vegetables, nor the anxiety of the food remaining under-cooked. Equally important, is that the spicy aroma uniformly pervades the food.
2. Instead of *roti*, *jeerā bhākhri*s, which are thicker, can be made easily, even by an amateur. To save time they should be made in a large batch during spare hours, say on weekends. To enhance taste and melt-in-the-mouth crumbliness, use extra oil or ghee, salt and roasted, semi-ground jeeru. The *bhākhri*s should be roasted at low heat, to near-biscuit crispiness, then cooled and stored. This batch can last a whole week. Before eating them, they should be warmed. The reason for using barley and corn flour is that in addition to enhancing taste, they do not cause mucous. Wheat causes mucous (catarrh).
3. Since white bread and pitta bread (*nān*) are made of plain flour, it is healthy to avoid these.
4. Like *khichdi*, vegetable soup is also easily made using the pressure cooker. Once the *vaghār* and water boil, add the vegetables. After opening the cooker, blend the contents. Hot water may be added for a thinner consistency.
5. Cooking need not be done everyday. The items can be prepared in larger quantities to last 3 to 5 days and stored in the fridge. At meal times, portions from the stock can be re-warmed in a non-stick pan.
6. *Chhās* (thin buttermilk) is preferable to milk, since the latter produces mucous (catarrh) in the body.
7. Avoid incompatible food combinations (*virudh āhār*). The most common practice abroad, is to have fruit or juice after milk and cereal for breakfast with fruit juice. Ayurveda considers milk and fruits incompatible. A long term habit of eating

Amazing known benefits of kadhi:

- (1) Generally in Gujarati cuisine, after a heavy dairy sweet such as *dudhpāk* or *shrikhand*, one is given *kadhi* with rice, instead of *dāl*. Why? Because it is a digestive and mucolytic. It helps clear mucous that will be caused by the dairy sweet.
- (2) Easy to digest. Hence it is the traditional evening item with *khichdi* in Gujarat and Saurashtra.
- (3) Highly therapeutic food for those with runny nose, colds, sinusitis, asthma & cough. Because it contains ginger, methi & haldi (better if available as fresh root).
- (4) Reduces blood cholesterol because of the above three items.
- (5) In illness, first think of *kadhi* rather than juice or soup, even for breakfast & lunch!
- (6) Fast to cook; 2-3 glassfuls in less than 10 mins!

Note on milk (ref. tip 6)

'The most serious difficulty with dairy consumption is the formation of mucus in the system.... It's the most mucus-forming food on the planet, and it doesn't go well with anything.... the calcium in cow's milk is much coarser than in human's milk, and is tied up with the casein. This prevents the calcium from being absorbable... From what does the cow attain all its calcium? Grain and grass!... green leafy vegetables, all nuts contain calcium... raw sesame seeds contain more calcium than any other food on earth.'

– Harvey Diamond, *Fit For Life*
(1987:109-112)

In Gujarati cuisine, there are 2 delicious items of sesame: *til chiki* and *kachariyu* – ground *til* with jaggery, available in winter in India. However, abroad *tahini* paste is a good non-sweet option.

Incompatible foods:

milk with sour foods, milk & fruits, milk with certain pulses such as *kalthi*, *vāl*, *muth*, *udad* & salt.

(Maharshi Vagbhata, 5th CE, *Ashtānghruday*, *Sutrasthān* 7/31-38)

Nuts about protein

Proteins are proteins, regardless of the source. 'Formerly vegetable proteins were classified as second-class and inferior to first-class proteins of animal origin. This distinction has now been discarded.'

– The Lancet, London, 2:956, 1959.

"Kids nowadays.... tend to go overboard when they discover body building and eat diets consisting of 50-70% protein – something I believe to be totally unnecessary...."

– Arnold Schwarzenegger:

"Vegetarians always ask about getting enough protein. But I don't know any nutrition expert that can plan a diet of natural foods resulting in a protein deficiency, so long as you're not deficient in calories. You need only 6% of total calories in protein...."

– Nathan Pritikin in Vegetarian Times (43:21).

"Pure vegetarians from many populations of the world have maintainedexcellent health."

– National Academy of Sciences, Washington D.C. (1974:2).

Young Hindus at any age after 25, who gorge on udad, beans, soya and dairy products to get more protein, are inviting gout. This is an extremely painful bone joint disorder. This normally occurs in meat eaters. However, even Hindu vegetarians are now suffering from this. Such a high protein intake burdens the kidneys to breakdown the excess, which is converted to uric acid.

Just think about the muscle bound alpha male gorilla which has the same physiology as man. Does it eat grains, pulses, nuts, soya, dairy products, to nourish its 350 kg body? The same argument applies for all four-legged herbivores and beasts of burden such as ox, buffalo, camel and elephant. From what do they get their protein and calcium? Leafy vegetation.

incompatible foods can lead to loss of lustre, strength, memory, intellect, vitality of the senses, mental strength, and diseases and disorders such as diabetes, tuberculosis, colic, fever, leprosy and other skin diseases (Ashtānhruday, Sutrasthān 7/30).

9. To balance sourness (of tomatoes or lemons) in any recipe, it is healthier to use either dried fruits such as figs, dates or jaggery, instead of white sugar.
10. If vegetables are placed in cold water and brought to boil, more than half the vitamin C is destroyed by the oxygen in the water. Therefore add vegetables after the water boils. Only then close the pressure cooker's lid.

Simplified five-step vaghār

1. Heat 5 tsf oil* at medium gas.
2. Add the following:
3 cloves, 2-3 pieces cinnamon, 1 tsf jeerā and rāi.
3. As soon as the jeerā starts sizzling, add (if available): shredded ginger/green chilli/limdi leaves.
4. Pour water; increase heat and bring water to boil.
5. Add all the foodstuffs, including turmeric, masala, salt & jaggery. Stir lightly and close lid.

* For kadhi, use ghee instead of oil, plus fenugreek (methi) in step 2.

tsf = teaspoonful



Cooking details for items 1 to 6 in table p.426

Amounts are for 2 servings – the maximum capacity of a 3 litre pressure cooker.

1. Swāminārāyan Khichdi

- 1 fistful rice • 1 fistful *dāl* (mung) • 3 cupfuls mixed, chopped vegetables
- To *vaghār* (see p.424), add 5 cups water. Bring to boil. Add the vegetables and grains.
- Add 3 tsf* salt, ½ tsf turmeric. Stir lightly. Close lid of cooker. Heat till steam vents twice (2 ‘whistles’). Switch off and leave to simmer for 10 mins.

2. Mixed vegetable pulao

All steps as (1) above, except: omit *dāl*, use 2 fistfuls rice and 4 cups water. Instead of turmeric add 1 tsf powdered black pepper.

3. Mixed vegetable *shāk* (*sabji*)

All steps as (1) above. Omit rice and *dāl*. Use 2 cups water, 2 chopped tomatoes. Add 1 tsf *masālā*. Jaggery optional, to adjust the sourness.

4. Spiced pongal (south Indian dish)

Method is similar to *khichdi*:

(A) cook the rice, mung *dāl* (2:1 cupfuls), salt (1 tsf.), *haldi* (1 tsf.), in pressure cooker.

(B) *vaghār* the following in a separate pan:

ghee (5 tsf.), whole black pepper (½ tsf.), *jeerā* (1 tsf.), *dhānā* & *limdi* leaves.

After opening cooker, add mixture (B), taking care not to mush the rice.

5. Mixed vegetable *paunwā*

Amount for one person

- 3 cupfuls *paunwā* – thick, fluffy type for making *chevado*.
- 2-3 cupfuls frozen (or fresh) mixed vegetables (peas, carrots, potatoes), as thawed in 1.
- 1 fistful each – groundnuts & brown raisins
- 3 tsf sugar • 1 tsf salt
- 1/2 cup oil for *vaghār* (seasoning)
- 1-2 tsf freshly squeezed lemon juice

During his two year stay in Surat, an English chaplain noted the nutritious virtue of khichdi, 'Kitcheree is another Dish very common among them, made of Dol (dāl), that is, a small Pea and Rice boiled together, and is very strenghtening.'

- John Ovington - A Voyage to Suratt in the year 1689 (Rawlinson 1928:183).



vegetable pulao



spiced pongal

Preparation time : Less than 8 mins!



vegetable paunwā

*tsf = teaspoonful

Veg. delights for students

Main item	Contents	Best eaten with	Remarks	Cooking time
1) <i>Swāminārāyan Khichdi</i> . Originated in the Swāminārāyan sampradāya during the time of Aksharbrahman Gunātītānand Swami.	rice, <i>mung dāl</i> , fresh or frozen vegetables: peas, carrots, potatoes, sweet corn. Cashew nuts, groundnuts & raisins optional. <i>Vaghār</i> of oil and spices (ref. p.424).	<i>kadhi</i> , <i>chhās</i> & <i>jeera bhākhri</i> – of whole meal barley & corn flour. Equal parts	well-balanced, easily digestible meal, with plenty of iron, fibre, vitamins & anti-oxidants. Nuts make the khichdi ‘chewy’.	15 + 5 mins. to season always cook at medium heat.
2) Spiced mixed vegetable <i>pulao</i>	basmati rice, vegetables as above, a half chopped beet for a pleasant pink tinge. <i>Vaghār</i> of oil & cloves, <i>jeerā</i> , cinnamon, powdered black pepper.	as above	brown, unpolished rice is more healthful than the polished white type that Gujaratis normally use.	as above. N.b. brown rice takes longer to cook.
3) Mixed <i>shāk</i> (Hindi – <i>sabji</i>) with liquid base of tomatoes for <i>rasādār shāk</i> .	vegetables as in (1) & jaggery (ref. tip 9).	as in 1 above, rice or pulao	making this <i>shāk</i> means that one does not need to <i>mung dāl</i> also.	12 mins.
4) Spiced pongal [✧]	rice, <i>mung dāl</i> , whole black pepper, <i>jeerā</i> , <i>haldi</i> , salt, ghee, coriander & limdi leaves	<i>chhās</i>	south Indian dish similar to plain Gujarati <i>khichdi</i> but spiced.	15 + 5 mins. to add spiced ghee mixture.
5) Mixed vegetable <i>paunwā</i>	<i>paunwā</i> , frozen mixed vegetables.	soup, <i>chhās</i> or <i>kadhi</i>	well balanced, tasty, & satiating ‘meal’!	8 mins.
6) Mixed vegetable soup Farāri soup →	vegetables as in (1). tomato, carrot, beet, potato, <i>dudhi</i> , groundnuts, dessicated coconut, 3 figs for crunchiness.	on its own, as a light, yet nutritious liquid & snack.	ghee or oil acts as anti- <i>vāṭṭa</i> (antiflatulent)	12 mins.
7) <i>Kadhi</i> (buttermilk curry)	buttermilk (<i>chhās</i>) 1 pint (500 mls), 3 tsf* gram flour. 1.5 tsf salt, <i>vaghār</i> of ghee – see p.429	with <i>khichdi</i> , rice, <i>paunwā</i> , <i>mamrā</i> , <i>chevado</i> (see p.429) or on its own.	see margin p.423 for amazing benefits of <i>kadhi</i>	6 mins.
8) <i>Rāb</i> (For <i>farāri rāb</i> use <i>morio</i> or <i>singodā</i> flour).	2-3 tsf barley or <i>bājri</i> flour, 2 tsf ghee, 3 tsf jaggery stirred in hot water. Powdered: ginger, <i>ganthodā</i> , cloves, cinnamon, cardamom.	on its own.	light, nutritious, helps decrease mucous, especially healthy in winter for coughs & colds	6 mins.
9) Ginger tea (ઉંચળ – without milk)	1/2 tsf powdered ginger & pinch of the following: <i>ganthodā</i> , cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, mint, black pepper	on its own.	decreases mucous, hence effective in colds.	2 mins.

* tsf – teaspoonful

✧ *Spiced pongal* has been included as a delicious south Indian item, similar to *khichdi*, and will also be welcomed by south Indian students. Its *vaghār* is mixed after the *pongāl* is cooked.

Spices: 1/2 tsf *rāi*, 1 tsf *jeerā*, 1/2 tsf *haladi*, chopped green chilli (optional), *limdi* leaves (if available).

Method

1. Wash the *paunwā* 3 times with water. Then drain the water. Leave to soak.
2. *Vaghār*. Heat the oil at low gas. First add *rāi* until it sizzles. Stir. Add the nuts and raisins till the raisins inflate. Add salt. Then add the *paunwā* and vegetables. Mix contents carefully without crushing the *paunwā*. Once the *paunwā* are uniformly yellow, switch off gas. Add coriander (*dhānā*) leaves & pomegranate if available. Lid the vessel.
3. Offer to Bhagwān. Adjust salt to taste.

Health features

- This ‘snack’ is *sāttvic*, satiating well-balanced light to digest, does not cause mucous (*aam* or *kapha*), acidity (*pitta*), indigestion or constipation.
- Ideal for diabetics who wish for a snack with complex carbohydrates, protein and fat.
- Ideal during illness when light food is advocated.
- From an Ayurvedic viewpoint this snack is 100% healthier than a bread sandwich.

Students and pilgrims travelling long distances in India may have to spend up to 1-2 days in a train. Besides the usual *dhebhrā*, *puri*, etc., they can easily ‘make’ and relish *paunwā* (without the potatoes).

One only needs to take dry *paunwā* and the *vaghār* with all the spices and salt dissolved in it – cooled and bottled. One can prepare the *paunwā* in a strong plastic carrier bag. After they are soaked using bottled water, pour in the spiced oil and mix in the bag. No need for utensils!

Lunch packaging for school kids

School kids do not necessarily have to lunch on the unhealthy stereotype, cold milk & white bread sandwiches packed in plastic boxes. In India, 2 & 3-tiered insulated tiffins are common. Using these, Hindu kids can have a warm, filling, well-balanced, delicious lunch in royal style!

tier 1 – *dhebhrā/tikhi puri*, etc.

tier 2 – Swāminārāyan khichdi / spiced rice/potato *paunwā*, etc.

tier 3 – hot mung dāl / veg.soup / warm spiced *chhās*.

Note

• If frozen mixed vegetables are not available, then cook two standard sized potatoes and 1 carrot in a pressure cooker (2 vents). Then chop and add to the *paunwā*.

• If the youth needs something extra to calm the growling in the stomach, eat with vegetable soup, *vaghāreli* (spiced) *chhās*, *rāb* or even *kadhi* – for those with *kapha* constitution.

Cautionary note for vegetarian Hindus using tinned foods:

It cannot be emphasised enough that freshly cooked foods using fresh or frozen vegetables have more *prāna* than tinned foods. There's the additional problem of industrial lubricants derived from animals, added when hot steel is rolled into thin sheets to make tin plate for the cans. Do check with the manufacturer.

– Steven Lustgarden in *Vegetarian Times* (1992:10)

Purines

Cabbage, cauliflower and other vegetables of the brassicae family have purposefully been omitted in recipes 1,2,3 & 6 precisely because (i) they override and spoil the original taste of those dishes & (ii) they contain purines which are converted to uric acid. See p.424 for problems caused by uric acid even in vegetarians.



insulated tiffin



insulated lunch box

Caution about sugar intake

Whether white, brown or honey too, sugar is rapidly absorbed into the system where it suppresses immune function..... Within 30 minutes of eating 3.5 ounces (100 g.) of sugar – any type – immunity is depressed by up to 50 %. This continues for up to 5 hours.

– Leon Chaitow in *Clear Body, Clear Mind*, (1990:143).

In a BAPS survey of kids in 2002, in India, UK & USA, the daily average intake of sugar in the diet was 15, 100 & 225 gms. respectively.

Q. Whose health is more likely to be undermined chronically?

**6. Mixed vegetable soup**

All steps as in (1), except use 6 cupfuls water. After opening cooker, liquify using a blender. Add water for a thinner consistency. Adjust salt to taste. Do not sieve.

7. Rāb

- Heat 3 tsf. jaggery in 2 glassfuls water (400 ml), until jaggery dissolves. Switch off gas.
- Simultaneously, in the non-stick pan, stir and roast the flour in ghee at low-medium heat. Flour will be roasted in about 40 secs., recognisable by a typical roasted almond aroma. Then stir in the powdered spices. Pour in the hot jaggery water. Increase heat and stir for 1 min.

Potato bhajiyā

As a point of interest, the word ‘bhajiyā’ officially entered the Oxford English Dictionary, 11th edition, in 2004.

A tasty and filling snack of potato bhajiyā can be fried in less than 15 mins. This is not meant for those worried about oily foods. Bhajiyā of banana and *galkā* (type of marrow) can also be fried.

Such a snack once or twice a week is not unhealthy.

Ingredients

- *chanā* (gram) flour (*besan* – fine ground) – 3 table-spoon.
- potatoes – 3 to 4 medium (orange-sized), sliced into wafer thinness using slicer (see photo).
- *ajmo* (spice) – half tsf.
- red chilli powder – half tsf. to enhance taste
- salt – 1.5 tsf. • no sugar or sourness.
- soda-bicarb – pinch.
- cooking oil (best for taste is groundnut or cottonseed).

Method

Cooking time: 15 mins.

First start heating the oil in a frying pan, at low gas. During this time, mix the above ingredients in a bowl. Add enough water to make a medium-thick *khiru* (batter). Add the potato slices in the *khiru*. Make sure each slice is fully coated.

When the oil is fully heated in about 6-7 minutes, turn the gas to medium. Then slip the slices one by one into the

oil, either from the side or from the centre. Take care not to dip one's fingers in the hot oil. Stir and invert the bhajiyā a few times till they turn golden brown. Remove from the side, making sure the extra oil is drained from the *jāro*. Then place the bhajiyā on a kitchen towel (tissue) to soak up extra oil. Break one bhajiyā to see whether the potato has been cooked fully. If slightly raw it will be hard and crisp. If fully cooked it will mush easily. Offer to Bhagwān. Then eat with green chutney or sauce (see recipe on p.430).

The key ingredient which gives bhajiyā their typical taste, is *ajmo*. One can add more than half tsf. It also acts as an anti-flatulent, since the gram flour and potatoes can both cause gas.

Kadhi (buttermilk curry)

Method

Cooking time :10 mins.

- (A) Add the gram flour and salt in the buttermilk (*chhās*). Churn thoroughly with blender. Salt is added at this early stage, because if one forgets and adds it late, then the *chhās* will curdle on heating. This will have to be discarded.
- (B) *Vaghār* of ghee on low gas, in the following sequence: cloves, cinnamon and *methi*, till the latter turns brown. Then add *rāi*. When this crackles, add *jeeru*, turmeric, *limdi* leaves, grated ginger and green chilli (chopped/crushed). Then pour (A) above into this. Increase gas. Stir occasionally till first 'rise'. Then decrease gas. Keep stirring for a few minutes. Traditionally sugar/jaggery is not used in kadhi. But if one likes a sweet tinge, add 1-2 tsf. jaggery, which is healthier than sugar. Add half the coriander leaves at this stage and the rest at the end. The more the *kadhi* boils, the greater its healthful and digestive power (आमपाचक).

Tip: To make the *kadhi* more delicious, add half a ripe banana (chopped) during *vaghār*. For those with colds, etc., it is best to avoid banana, since it causes catarrh.

Vadā of potato & paunwā

This is a delicious, innovative variation of the common Gujarati potato *vadā*. This also serves as a snack-type satiating meal in itself. Traditionally, potato *vadā* do not



mamrā



chevado

Benefits of green chutney

Rather than tomato sauce, vadā are best eaten with green chutney, which is Ayurvedically healthy. It acts both as a digestive and an antifatulent.

Ingredients: mint & dhana leaves, ginger, green chilli, dessicated coconut, groundnuts, lemon juice, salt & sugar, crushed in a blender using water. Adjust sourness, salt & chilli to one's preference.

Proteins consist of 20 amino acids. Of these 12 are made by the body. Only 8, known as essential amino acids (EAAs) are needed from food. **Plants are the root source of all the 8 EAAs, whether they originated from a cow that ate pulses and grain, or from a fish that ate a smaller fish that ate seaweed!**

– B. Davis, in *Becoming Vegan*, (2000:44).

Therefore a well balanced plant-based diet, not necessarily lacto, can completely provide all our protein needs (ref. note on p.424 about the gorilla's diet).

If Hindu mothers of kids with allergies to dairy products wish to make a milk treat, then milk from soya, rice, peas, oats and even potatoes, is available from health food stores. These milks cause less mucous (aam) than cow milk.

include peas and *paunwā* (parched rice). Both have been added to: increase bulk more tastefully, conveniently, with a less flatulent effect and increased nutritive value.

(A)

orange-sized potatoes (total weight 500 g)
½ cup frozen peas (thawed)
½-1 cup *paunwā*
2 tsf. salt
8 tsf. fresh lemon juice

(B)

3 tsf. oil for *vaghār*
½ tsf. *masālā* powder
10-12 cashew nuts & raisins each
1-2 tsf. ginger root (crushed)

Method

Cooking time: 40 mins.

Cook the potatoes in a pressure cook (1 'whistle'). Peel off skin. Leave to cool. Then mash them. Mix the dry *paunwā*. Add sugar, salt, lemon juice & coriander leaves. Taste a bit of this dough (A). Adjust salt and sugar to taste.

Then add the 'vaghared' items (B). Mix thoroughly. Roll into lemon-sized balls. Dip in the *khiru* and fry them as in the *bhajiya* recipe.

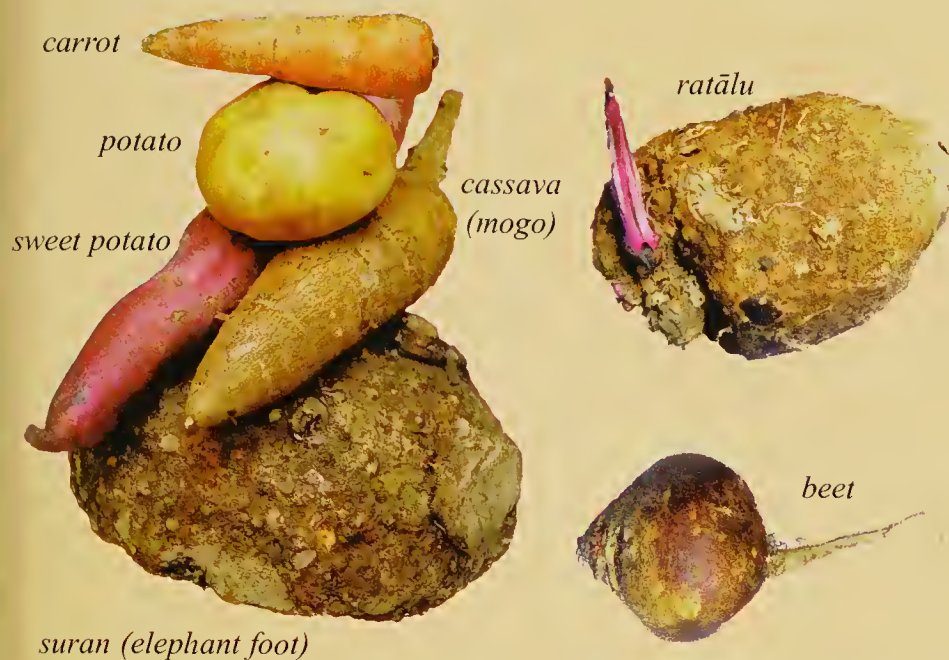
Remarks

The dough balls should be dry while rolling. If sticky, add some more *paunwā*. Those worried about cholesterol may omit cashew nuts.



Appendix - 6 – Farāri foods

Tubers



Dairy products

Dried fruits & nuts

Flour: of singodā & of items 1, 2 & 3

Oils: groundnut, sesame seed, cotton seed, safflower, sunflower, coconut and olive, but not corn

Salt: staunch Vaishnavs avoid sea salt and use rock salt (sindhav) instead

Spices: all except methi (fenugreek)

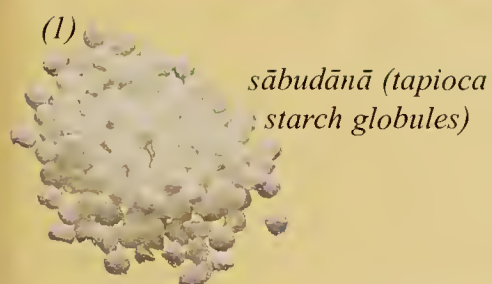
Vegetables: those shown below and tomato, cabbage, cauliflower, asparagus, pumpkin, spinach, lettuce, capsicum and green chilli

Coffee is considered farāri. The 'coffee bean' is botanically the fruit of the coffee plant. It is not a bean (legume).

Vegetables



Fruits



Special grains



Appendix – 7

Nine reasons why Gujarati food is awesome!

Sanjeev Kapoor
– India’s most celebrated chef.
(Source: *Amdavad Times*,
12 October, 2006).

‘Gujarati thāli is a perfectly balanced meal. From servings of different vegetables and pulses to inclusion of pickles, savouries and sweets, along with rice, *chapāti* and yogurt – it fulfills all the requirements that a food pyramid advises us.

Versatile:

I have eaten some unbelievably wholesome combinations like soft *khichdi* with sweet and sour *kadhi*, then the same *khichdi* tastes plain with a spoon of ghee! *Khichdi* with *chhās* is tasty and so is *khichdi* with papads and pickles.

Perfect blend:

It is no longer rare to see some Gujarati preparations at all weddings. It blends perfectly with all types of cuisine. In fact in my home we mix and match a lot of Punjabi and Gujarati preparations.

Balanced:

With all aspects of nutrition – carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals from *chapāti*, rice, vegetables and pulses, salads, sweets and dairy products, I can say that Gujarati food offers some very healthy combinations.

Satisfies all six senses :

Have a full Gujarati meal and your all six senses of taste are satisfied. That is the reason why pickles and sweets are considered important along with the *dāl*, *bhāt*, *shāk* and *rotli*.

Popular:

Till some years ago, we could not find *khākhṛās* in a shop in north India. Or for that matter *khaman dhoklā* was considered as exotic food! But now things are different. We can buy *khākhṛās* in Amritsar too. And readymade *khaman dhoklā* in a mall in Hyderabad! We also enjoy *undhiyu* at Maharashtrian weddings.

Variety:

Well, I have said it once but can say it again: a Gujarati family can enjoy 365 different recipes 365 days of the year. The variety is worth exploring.

Creative:

One can get creative with Gujarati *farsān* and *mishtān*. I have tried *gānthiā nu shāk*, fresh fruits in *bāsundi*...this cuisine is open to fusion.

Perfection:

Try making *khāndvi* following a recipe book and then make it with your Gujarati friend. The look will differ. I know for sure that their *rotlis* are perfectly soft and fluffy, the *dais* (yogurt) just perfectly sweet and sour, the rice perfectly salted, the *dhoklā* with even thickness... I mean there are no second chances.

Taste:

Taste is supreme. That’s what makes Gujarati food such a winner.’

Traditional Gujarati thāli



water

pāpad

rāitu

dāl

peas &
carrot shāk

chanā &
potato shāk

stuffed
ringal &
potato
shāk

dhoklā

gotā

jalebi

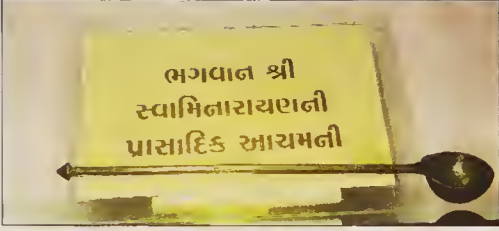
pān

chhās

rotli

saffron dudhpāk

Glossary



*sacred āchmani used by
Bhagwān Swāminārāyan
(Abhishek mandapam, BAPS Shri
Swāminārāyan Mandir, Amdavad).*

abhishek

pouring a liquid on a *murti*, *shāligrām* or *Shivaling*, as a form of veneration and *pujā* ritual.

āchmani

spoon used to hold water during *pujā* rituals.

āhwān

invocation

ahimsā

non-violence in thought, word and deed.

Aksharbrahman

one of the five eternal realities
Also, the ideal Devotee of
Parabrahman — Bhagwān
Swāminārāyan.

Akshardhām

abode of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan
aggregate of *manas*, *buddhi*,
chitta and *ahamkāra*.

antahkaran

archāswarup

worshipful *murti*

ārti

ritual of worship by waving *divā*
(*deeps*)

āsana

a seat e.g. a mat for sitting in
pujā. Also third limb of *Ashtāng
Yog*.

ashtāng

eight parts of the body

āskā

ritual of lightly touching the *gyot*
of the *ārti* with one's hands and
then touching one's head and
eyes with the fingers, thus
sanctifying oneself.

ātmā

the pure *jīva*

ātmachintan

thinking about the *ātmā*'s
attributes.

āvartan

circular motion of *ārti*, revolution
incarnation.

avatār

Bhagwān

one who possesses *aishwarya* —
divine power, *Paramātmā*.

*The word 'Bhagwān' officially
entered the Oxford English
Dictionary, 11th edition, in 2004.*

bhajan	devotional lyrics glorifying Bhagwān.
bhakta	devotee of Bhagwān
bhakti	devotion to Bhagwān
bhāvnā	sentiment
bhog	that (food) which is relished. Word usually used by Vaishnavs.
brahmacharya	eight-fold celibacy and being engrossed in Brahman.
Brahman	one of the five eternal realities, Aksharbrahman, the divine abode of Bhagwān Swāminārāyan.

C

chāndlo	round mark of <i>kumkum</i> (vermilion) powder on forehead
charan	lotus-feet of Paramātmā, feet of <i>sadhu</i> or any holy person.
chitta	the mind

D

dān	donation
dandvat	prostration, lit. like a staff
darshan	to look at Paramātmā, the <i>murti</i> , or <i>sadhu</i> reverentially, and simultaneously feel that one is being graced by them.
Deva	deity
dharma	righteousness, religion, moral duty, code of ethical conduct, justice.
dhun	singing or chanting a mantra or name of Paramātmā.
divo	a lighted wick in an earthen or metal crucible filled with ghee or oil. Plural – <i>divā</i> , Hindi – <i>diyā</i> .
dravya	substance, paraphernalia

E

Ekāntik Bhakta	one who has realised the four
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Ekāntik Dharma	aspects of <i>Ekāntik Dharma</i> . composite religion of dharma, <i>jnān</i> , <i>vairāgya</i> and bhakti.
G	
garbha gruha	sanctum sanctorum of a mandir in which the deities are consecrated.
gaumukhi	cloth bag for holding and turning a <i>mālā</i> .
guna	attribute, a state of being regarding the three <i>gunas</i> , good attribute.
Gunātit	state above the three <i>gunas</i> , above <i>māyā</i> .
H	
Harililāmrutam	a poetic shāstra of the Swāminārāyan sampradāya, composed by Dalpatram Kavi describing Bhagwān Swāminārāyan's life.
himsā	violence, to kill, injure or hurt by thought, speech and action.
I	
Ishvara	Deity, one of the five eternal realities.
Ishtadeva	avatār or deity whom one worships.
J	
jāgran	staying awake during nights of <i>vrats</i> and <i>utsavs</i> to listen to <i>kathā</i> and Bhagwān's <i>lilā</i> .
janma-maran	cycle of births and deaths, <i>punarjanma</i> .
japa	mantra recitation
jnān	knowledge
jyot	flame of a <i>dīvo</i>

K

kanthi	stringed beads of tulsi or sandalwood, worn around the neck as a symbol of <i>sharanāgati</i> to one's <i>Ishtadeva</i> .
kathā	discourse on a shāstra
kriyā	act or performance of a rite or ritual.
kund	fire pit in a <i>yagna</i> , <i>vedhi</i>

L

lilā	divine episodes of Paramātmā and the Gunātīti Sadhu.
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M

maanta	self-pledged vow to overcome a mundane problem.
mahātmya	greatness, glory and grandeur of Paramātmā.
mahimā	glory
mahotsav	mega festival (<i>mahā + utsav</i>)
manan	to think on the spiritual discourse and to accept what is applicable to oneself (compare with <i>nīdidhyāsan</i>).
mandir	a dwelling of worship in Sanātan Dharma.
māṅgalik	auspicious, holy
mantra	sacred word or sound recited during worship or meditation
māyā	ignorance, material universe, darkness. One of the five eternal realities.
moksha	liberation from <i>māyā</i> and cycle of birth and deaths.
murti	icon, deity

N

nād	divine sound
naivedya	food offered to a deity

nakshatra	asterism, one of 27 parts of the ecliptic, which the motion of the Sun is divided into.
nididhyāsan	constant reflection after <i>manan</i> , on the principles one has accepted and to imbibe them in one's life.
nishedh	the 'don'ts' of the code of conduct (opp. of 'vidhi').

P

*ashwastho dumbaro plaksha
chutanyagrodh pallavāhā.*

*panchabhangā iti proktāhā sarva
karma sushobhanāhā.*

– peepal, umbaro, khākhro, mango &
banyan, are said to be auspicious in
all rituals

Panch Mahābhuts	the five elements (of māyā) – earth, water, fire (light), air and space.
panchāṅg	five parts of the body, also astrological almanac.
pāp	sin
Parabrahman	see Paramātmā
Param Ekāntik Satpurush	the Gunātīt Sadhu, the embodiment of <i>Ekāntik Dharma</i> .
Paramātmā	the Supreme Reality
paramparā	lineage of spiritual successors
pitrus	departed ancestors, manes
pradakshinā	circumambulation
prāna	life-force, vital air
prāna pratishthā	consecration ritual by a realised sadhu to invoke Paramātmā in a <i>murti</i> , with the aid of Vedic mantras.
pranām	ritual of respect (<i>namaskār</i>), in which one utters “ <i>Namaste</i> ” or a deity's name with palms joined.
prārthnā	prayer
prasād	favour, kindness, <i>krupā</i> . Also sanctified food, see <i>prasādam</i> .
prasādam	food offered to Bhagwān or deity, which then becomes sanctified.
pratyaksh	visible before one's eyes
pujā	a ritual of worship, of veneration
punya	spiritual merit, opposite of <i>pāp</i>

R

rajas one of the three *gunas*, attribute/state of: activity, restlessness, anger, violence, desire to satisfy the *indriyas* and extravagance.

rāshi asterism, lunar mansion

S

sabhā a general gathering or a religious gathering, depending on the region in India.

sādhak an aspirant, a novice on the spiritual path.

sādhū a Vaishnava ascetic

sākār upāsanā worship of Paramātmā with form
sampradāya a religious order, a tradition handed down from a founder through successive spiritual gurus.

samsāra worldly life, cycle of births and deaths.

samskāra virtue, to improve upon something (ref. defn. on p.280).

Satpurush the Gunātī Sadhu, *Param Ekāntik Satpurush*.

satsang Literally – association with *Sat* – Truth, which means with Paramātmā, Gunātī Guru, true sadhus and study of *śāstras* glorifying Paramātmā. Also, synonym for the Swāminārāyan sampradāya.

sattva one of the three *gunas*, state of: clarity and purity of thought, excellence, mental poise.

sevā selfless service

sharanāgati devotional surrenderance to Bhagwān.

Shikshāpatri code of conduct written by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan of 212 Sanskrit *śloks* (couplets).

shrāddh	ritual of offering <i>pindas</i> to departed ancestors/manes.
siddha	an adept, one who has attained realisation.
snān	bath, bathing
sthitapragna	one whose intellect is stable, undeflectable (Gitā 2/55-58).
sutak	period of impurity after birth or death.
swabhāva	base instinct such as anger, ego, lust, greed, envy, hate, jealousy, etc.

T

tamas	one of the three <i>gunas</i> , attribute/state of: inactivity, lethargy, darkness and ignorance.
tapas	austerity, self-abnegation, such as fasting and bearing extremes of heat and cold.
Thākorji	synonym for Bhagwān, also <i>murti</i> in the <i>ghar mandir</i> .
thāl	food offered to Paramātmā – with or without singing the appropriate bhajans.
thulābhāram	weighing of a child or person against foodstuffs or some other item in temples of south India (see p.142).
tirth	a sacred place of pilgrimage.

U

upāsanā	worship of Paramātmā with special emphasis on His greatness and glory.
upavās	fast, fasting
utsav	festival

V

Vachanāmrut	the principle philosophical
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shāstra of the Swāminārāyan sampradāya. It is a compilation of 262 discourses by Bhagwān Swāminārāyan from 1819 to 1829. For details see *Vachanāmṛut Handbook*, published by Swāminārāyan Aksharpith, 3rd ed. (2007).

vartmān

ritual of initiation, in the Swāminārāyan sampraday (ref. Ch.29. Kanthi).

vāsanā

baser instincts such as lust, anger, greed, pride/ego, hate, jealousy, etc.

vidhi

ritual, acts, procedures, also the ‘do’s’ of the codes of conduct (opp. of *nishedh*).

vivāh

marriage

vrat

vow of self-denial, which may include fasting, *jāgran*, etc. (see Ch.32).

Y

yātrik

pilgrim

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<i>Ādi Purāna</i>	<i>Kālavivek</i>	<i>Sāmudrik Tilak</i>
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<i>Agni Purāna</i>	<i>Kāmikāgama</i>	<i>Sati Gitā</i>
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<i>Arthdeepikā</i>	<i>Krishna Yajur Veda Samhitā</i>	<i>Shankha Smruti</i>
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<i>Atharva Veda</i>	<i>Laghu Hārit</i>	<i>Shātātāp</i>
<i>Atri Smruti</i>	<i>Laugakshibhāskar</i>	<i>Shikshāpatri</i>
<i>Baudhāyan Dharma Sutras</i>	<i>Mahābhārat</i>	<i>Shilparatnākar</i>
<i>Baudhāyan Smruti</i>	<i>Mālatimādhav</i>	<i>Shiva Purāna</i>
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<i>Brahma Purāna</i>	<i>Matsya Purāna</i>	<i>Sushrut Samhitā</i>
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<i>Daksh Smruti</i>	<i>Prāchin Vratrāj</i>	<i>Vāsudeva Mahātmya</i>
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Pramukh Swami Maharaj

An eminent and saintly sadhu of India, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born on 7 December 1921, in the village of Chansad, Gujarat. He is the fifth successor in the illustrious spiritual tradition of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the embodiment of the universal Hindu ideals.

In his presence doubts dissolve, confusions clear, hurts heal and the mind finds peace. His selfless love and morality equally soothes and moralises children, youths and the aged; regardless of creed or status.

Out of his compassion for humanity, he has visited over 17,000 villages, towns and cities, sanctified over 250,000 homes, and read and replied to over 700,000 letters. He has ushered a cultural, moral and spiritual renaissance in India and abroad by establishing over 850 mandirs.

His striking humility, simplicity, spirituality, and above all, his profound experience and realisation of God, is the essence of his success and divine lustre.

hīndu rōḍḍi ḍ rōṭuḍḍi

(sentiments, sacraments & symbols)

is the author's fourth full-colour book in the cadre of "eventually growing category of a 'Hindu Dharma Encyclopaedia'" cited by Dr. Hasu Yajnik in his Foreword to *Hindu Festivals* (origin, sentiments & rituals), the author's previous book (2010). The first was *Vachanamrut Handbook* and the second, *Rishis, Mystics & Heroes of India* (Vol. I). This book break's the record with an astonishing number of 781 superb colour photographs, 90 paintings and 27 maps. These enable the reader to experience the depth and understanding of how Hindus live and have adjusted to migration, changing cultural trends and cope with daily stress by their rites, daily rituals and festivals.

The effort and care to include the minutest details and references from the ancient Sanskrit shastras is commendable. There's something here for every reader; all young Hindus who have been pestering parents about the 'why', their parents who sorely wished they had the right answers, as well as for teachers, admirers and academics.

A book worthy as a birthday gift and for young Hindus about to get married. The brief explanation of the *vivāh* rites with photographs will make the ceremony all the more meaningful and increase its sanctity in the hearts of the Hindu couple. A must read prior to marriage.

– Dr. Rashmikanth Mehta, Sanskritist, Author and Director, B.J. Institute of Learning & Research, Amdavad.

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